The Community College Experience of Black Male Achievers: Participation in Black Male Initiatives (BMIs)

by Richmond L. Hill

B.A. in Psychology, May 1998, North Carolina State University
M.Ed. in Counselor Education, May 2001, North Carolina State University

A Dissertation submitted to

The Faculty of
The Graduate School of Education and Human Development
of The George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education

May 17, 2020

Dissertation directed by

Lionel C. Howard
Associate Professor of Educational Research

The Graduate School of Education and Human Development of The George Washington University certifies that Richmond L. Hill has passed the Final Examination for the degree of Doctor of Education as of February 3, 2020. This is the final and approved form of the dissertation.

The Community College Experience of Black Male Achievers:
Participation in Black Male Initiatives (BMIs)

Richmond L. Hill

Dissertation Research Committee:

Lionel C. Howard, Associate Professor of Educational Research, Dissertation Director

Rick C. Jakeman, Associate Professor of Higher Education Administration, Committee Member

Lindsey E. Malcom-Piqueux, Senior Institutional Research Analyst and Chief Institutional Research Officer, California Institute of Technology, Committee Member

Dedication

To Jesus Christ, thank you for love, forgiveness, grace, mercy, favor, and peace. Thank you for blessing me with the tools to bring this goal to fruition. When I couldn't see the end, you would give me a glimpse of the finish line and the strength to endure. I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith.

To my parents, Floyd and Barbara Hill, thank you for your unending love and support over the years and for always reminding me that "baby steps" lead to progress. You have taught me the importance of a strong work ethic, and you have always encouraged me to do my best and to strive for more than I thought possible. Thank you for the value you placed on learning and education in our home. I admire your strength, perseverance, and patience in managing multiple responsibilities while raising three children and supporting each of our personal and academic pursuits. I will always be grateful for your commitment to fostering a home rich in love and faith and filled with lifelong memories. You were my first teachers, and I hold your words of wisdom in my heart as I move forward in this journey. Thank you for loving me unconditionally. Thank you for never allowing me to quit or give up when I was a kid. I didn't understand it then, but now I do. I am so grateful for those lessons in perseverance. Thank you for teaching me the importance of reaching back and giving back.

To the late Louise Henderson and Jessie "Shug" Rouse. You two women loved me to the moon and back. You were there all the time, and you were two of my biggest cheerleaders. Even though you are no longer physically with me, I feel your presence, hear your voices, and see your smiles, all of which keep me striving for greatness.

To my young Black brothers living in a world often harsh and quite inequitable, you inspire me and I offer you an African proverb that serves as my daily fuel. “Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up, it knows it must outrun the fastest lion or it will be killed. It knows it must run faster than the slowest gazelle, or it will starve. It doesn’t matter whether you’re the lion or a gazelle-when the sun comes up, you’d better be running.”

Finally, to my spouse, my best friend, and love of my life, Donald Phillips. You have been in this with me from the very beginning. You encouraged me when it was just a thought and when I wasn’t sure if I should take on this challenge. You were understanding and patient, and you constantly encouraged me when the tasks seemed arduous and insurmountable. You reminded me of my gifts and talents and admonished me to use them to the fullest. You packed my lunch, ironed my clothes, read over my writing, cared to understand my research, removed distractions, and delivered perfect escapes. This academic journey has been one of the most time-consuming things in our relationship, but you never made me feel like it was robbing us of anything. During this time, we discovered that we are unbreakable and enduring. Thank you for being there for me and for encouraging me through the toughest of times. For that, I am forever grateful. I owe so much of my success to you. We put in the work; now let’s enjoy the fruit of this accomplishment together.

Acknowledgements

A dissertation is not the outcome of the efforts of entirely one individual. Many people contribute to its development. I must acknowledge those who have made an impact on my doctoral journey and accomplishment.

I extend my sincerest gratitude to the faculty and staff of The George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development. A special thank you to my dissertation defense committee. Thank you, Dr. Lionel Howard, Dr. Lindsey Malcom-Piqueux, Dr. Rick Jakeman, Dr. Ashley Stone, and Dr. Robert Kelley. You were all very encouraging and inspiring as you ushered me into the Academy. A special thank you to Dr. Malcom Piqueuex and Dr. Howard, you became a part of my life, you sharpened me, and you affirmed me as a researcher. . To the late Gianna Miller, and to Sarah Landers and Marisa Hall, thank you for helping me to navigate some complicated university processes. You were always very patient and willing to help.

To Dr. Wandra P. Hill and SAA-PAMS, without you I would not have known that "I am somebody," that I am "African root and American fruit," and that I too could learn and reach the heights of academia, just as Imhotep did. Thank you for doing everything you could do to level the playing field and for instilling in me the passion and confidence to be successful.

To Dr. Mary Futrell, Dr. Roger Whitaker, and Dr. Jason Johnson, thank you for believing in me, challenging me, and for showing me a different and better way.

To Cedric Howard, Bobak Kasrai, and Rommel Aguilar, thank you for joining me on the journey to create empowering experiences for our young Black brothers.

To Dean Michael Turner, thank you for giving me a chance to create and to serve. You made space for me, for which I am grateful.

To Dr. Benita Stephens, I started this journey because I was tired of you asking me when I was going to start it. Thank you for asking me! You pushed me, and I'm grateful for it.

To Mrs. Andrea Bryson, thank you for making a way for me to start my career in this area. I learned the importance of humility and service from you.

To Debi DeLonchamp, you called me Dr. Hill before I even thought about entering a doctoral program. Thank you for speaking it into existence, long before the journey started.

To Mary Wallace, Shonda Goward, and Bradley Beecher, thank you for caring and sharing. Thank you for being transparent and remaining available and approachable throughout the entire process.

To Sheldon Lanier, your words of encouragement helped pull me across the finish line.

To my supervisors, Mark Bumgarner, Carolyn Custard, and Rebekah Schlatter, thank you for your patience, flexibility, understanding, and support throughout this process.

To Mt. Zion Baptist Church, words cannot express how you have fed my soul during this process. Thank you. To Deacon Donald Davis, thank you for asking me every Sunday, "have you finished your paper yet." It made me want to get done as soon as possible, so I could finally see you and answer, "yes."

To Alexzander Holmes, thank you for your unique, unconditional, and priceless friendship. Thank you for standing with me in all things.

To Floriana Fodera, thank you. You know.

To Tomas Bracero, thank you. You know.

To Christy Phillips, thank you. You know.

To Robert Parker, thank you for letting me know that it was possible.

To Tamaica Martin, thank you for calling me and texting me during those times when I did not feel like reading, writing, or doing research. Thank you for being my first editor and for encouraging me to feel confident in my research and writing.

To Donald and Fay Phillips, thank you for loving me, praying for me, encouraging me, and for brining my best friend into this world. Fay, your fight and perseverance encouraged me and let me know that I could do this regardless of how tough it became.

Finally, to the young men that participated in this research, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your time, honesty, and for sharing your experiences with me. Because of you, I have a deeper understanding of your journey and what it takes to succeed against all odds. I am inspired by your strength and determination. Thank you for trusting me enough to share with me and for allowing me to share it with the world. With every best wish, I remain.

Abstract of Dissertation

The Community College Experience of Black Male Achievers:
Participation in Black Male Initiatives (BMIs)

Countless Black men across the nation have chosen to make the most of their community college education, experiencing success inside and outside the classroom. Contrary to the deficit messages that largely characterize Black male collegians as academically underprepared and even unfit for college, there are many Black male achievers with impressive records of academic achievement, leadership, and service.

In response to inequities and to maximize opportunities for student success, many institutions of higher education have implemented programs and policies to address the opportunity and education gap experienced by Black male students. Such efforts include Black Male Initiatives (BMIs), which are informed by both empirical research on student success and the lived experiences of successful Black male students.

The research literature indicates that social and academic integration experiences and support mechanisms and structures (e.g., mentoring programs) have a positive impact on student retention and achievement (Wood, 2012). Therefore, a study providing further understanding of how successful Black male students describe and make meaning of their community college experiences, specifically as they relate to membership in a BMI becomes critically important.

This interpretive qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews to investigate the experiences of eleven Black males who graduated from two large, multi-campus, community colleges in the mid-Atlantic and northeastern regions of the United States. Wood and Harris's (2014) five domains of Black male student success in

community colleges provided a conceptual framework to investigate how participants made meaning of their community college experiences as members of a Black Male Initiative (BMI).

The findings of this study suggest that study participants had positive community college experiences and that a meaningful connection to the institution is essential to achievement for Black male community college students. Further, their membership in a BMI assisted them with identity development, adapting to a new environment, bonding with faculty, accessing student support services and campus resources, navigating life as a community college student, and ultimately achieving their educational goals. Overall, their BMI experiences were described as positive, inspiring, memorable, affirming, and empowering. The study findings have implications for higher education researchers and policy makers and can be used to inform BMI program design, resource allocation, and professional development. Finally, the findings emphasize the importance of institutions creating a supportive environment where Black males are welcomed and provided what they need to persist, stay engaged, and succeed academically.

Table of Contents

Dedication ..... **iii**

Acknowledgements ..... **v**

Abstract of Dissertation ..... **viii**

List of Tables ..... **xiii**

Chapter 1: Introduction ***1***

Background **2**

Statement of the Problem **3**

Anti-Deficit Approach **9**

Purpose and Research Questions **11**

Study Significance **11**

Conceptual Framework **13**

Summary of Methodology **16**

Limitations **16**

Definition of Terms **18**

Conclusion **18**

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature ***20***

Introduction **21**

Statement of the Problem **23**

Retention **24**

Reframing Black Male Student Success **27**

Pre-College Considerations 28

The Non-Cognitive Domain 31

The Social Domain 34

The Environmental Domain 35

The Academic Domain 36

The Institutional Domain 38

Research Gap **41**

Conclusion **42**

Chapter 3: Methodology ***43***

Research Purpose and Research Questions **44**

Paradigm of Inquiry **45**

Research Design and Methodology **46**

Site of Research 48

Research Sample 49

Data Collection 53

Data Management 54

Data Analysis 55

Data Presentation 56

Trustworthiness **57**

Limitations **57**

Researcher Subjectivity **59**

Ethical Considerations **61**

Conclusion **61**

Chapter 4: Findings ***63***

Theme 1: Positive Community College Experience **65**

Theme 2: Significant Administrator/Faculty/Staff Relationships **68**

Theme 3: Peer Interactions and Campus Engagement **74**

Theme 4: Holistic Support Provided Through the BMI **78**

Theme 5: Powerful Mentoring Relationships **84**

Theme 6: Personal Growth and Change **89**

Theme 7: BMI Exceeded Expectations: Appraisal, Value, and Meaning .. **93**

Theme 8: Perceptions of BMI Program Structure **97**

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications ***106***

Key Study Findings **107**

Research Question 108

Reflection on Conceptual Framework 117

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Research **121**

Conclusion **128**

References ***130***

Appendices ***145***

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Information 52

Table 2. Themes with Descriptions 65

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides background information to support the need for investigating the experiences of successful Black men who are former members of community college Black Male Initiatives (BMIs). The scholarly literature on BMIs is largely quantitative and investigates the relationships between program membership and academic achievement or other measurable outcomes. In contrast, this qualitative study focuses on the voices of successful Black men to understand how they experienced the activities, events, resources, and culture of BMIs. Additionally, it explores their perceptions of participation in such programs and the perceived connections to their success. One may ask, how is this study different from program evaluation? Although program evaluations may explore some of these areas, they typically focus on the merit, worth, or value of things, which are not the goals of this study. The evaluation process identifies relevant values or standards that apply to what is being evaluated, performs empirical investigation using techniques from the social sciences, and then integrates conclusions with the standards into an overall evaluation or set of evaluations (Scriven, 1991). Evaluative research is based upon a set of metrics that have been established and considers a theory of change that drives such efforts. As is the case in this study, Maxwell (2005) states that a goal of qualitative research is, "understanding the meaning for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engage in" (p. 22). Therefore, this study does not seek to assess program value but rather how the participants experienced these programs and their perceptions of how, if at all, they contributed to their success, from matriculation through graduation.

The research findings may help us to better understand the specific needs of Black male community college students, which may have implications for institutional commitment to such programs intended to support these students. This chapter serves as an overview of this study, including a statement of the problem, description of the research purpose and research questions, conceptual foundation and potential significance of the inquiry as well as limitations, delimitations, and definitions of key terms used in the study.

Background

The pursuit of higher education is critical and necessary for future economic success for individual citizens and for our nation. Bush and Bush (2010) argue that higher education is a tool for gaining equity in civic, economic, and political engagement. Community colleges have long served as educational centers with the goal of increasing educational access and thereby economic opportunity for its students (Bragg & Durham, 2012). Community colleges were created to provide affordable, open access education in preparation for entering the workforce. These institutions later evolved to also prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions.

Published research contends that Black males enroll in community colleges because of accessibility, lower costs, and convenience, to have access to upward social mobility (Wood & Palmer, 2013). As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics' Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (Planty, Hussar, & Snyder, 2009), of the Black males who enrolled in college, 70.55% enrolled in two-year colleges in contrast to only 28.5% who enrolled in four-year institutions. Characteristics such as working while attending school, being older, married, or having dependents present a challenge for Black males completing their educational goals (Wood &

Harrison, 2014). Black males suffer when campus policies and resources are not designed to meet their specific needs (Wood, 2012). Given these challenges and barriers, it is critical that institutions do more to intervene on behalf of Black male students to combat hostile racial climates, foster a sense of belonging, and support academic success.

Once in community colleges, Black male students do not experience equitable outcomes in regard to academic success (Wood, 2012). Therefore, research focusing on their college experiences is gaining importance (Ford & Moore, 2013; Harper & Davis, 2012; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Harris, 2010; Harris & Wood, 2013; Strayhorn, 2015; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Published data on Black male student success and the existing achievement gaps demonstrates the need for higher education, and community colleges in particular, to address the disparate outcomes for this population. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 11.4% of Black males who began at a two-year public institution in 2012 earned an associate degree in six years as compared with 25% of White males. Additionally, 40% of Black males stopped attending, compared with 27% of White males (Kena et al., 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The challenges facing Black male students in higher education have been extensively documented (Allen, 1986; Cuyjet, 1994; Harper, Carini, Bridges & Hayek, 2004; Harvey, 2002; Mason, 1998; Perrakis, 2008). Their experiences are characterized by under-preparation for college-level coursework and underrepresentation on majority campuses. Additionally, poor retention and poor degree attainment rates are often reported as characteristic of this student population (Allen, 1992; Cuyjet, 2006;

Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001-2002; Harper 2009). Harper (2009a) quoted the following:

> Anyone who takes time to read about them could confidently conclude that Black male undergraduates are troubled, their future is bleak, they all do poorly, and there is little that can be done to reverse longstanding outcomes disparities that render them among the least likely to succeed in college. (pp. 699-700).

Disproportionate college enrollments, disengagement, underachievement, and low rates of persistence and degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues for Black males in higher education today (Harper, 2009). Minority males traditionally have the lowest rates of retention and student success as compared to other student groups. Additionally, they often face issues related to insufficient academic preparation, culturally unresponsive campus environments, severe underrepresentation, inadequate funding, motivation, and a lack of academic and personal goal setting and planning (Wood, 2012). Far too many Black students, particularly males, tend to emerge from high school largely uninterested in or unprepared for college work (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). For these students already failed by the educational system, higher education can be perceived more as a secret society than a democratic opportunity for success (Cross & Slater, 2000; Hopkins, 1997; Polite & Davis, 1999).

Community colleges educate more Black males than any other type of higher education institution. The problem is that access does not guarantee success, specifically retention, persistence (enrollment from semester to semester and year to year), completion (degree and certificate), and transfer to a four-year university (Smith Morest, 2013). Many scholars have noted the low persistence rates of these students in community colleges (Brown, 2007; Fortson, 1994; Jordan, 2008; Pope, 2006; Stevens, 2006; Wilkins, 2005). These men, in comparison to other ethnic and gender groups, are

disproportionately underachieving in academic outcomes: percentage of degrees earned, persistence rates, and average cumulative grade point average (Bush & Bush, 2010). Wood and Williams (2013) reported that ‘‘11.5% of Black male students will depart from a community college within one year of admission, 48.9% leave after three years, and 83% leave after six years, without achieving their intended certificate or degree’’ (p. 2). Esters and Mosby (2007) analyzed associate degree completion rates among male students in the community college using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Their findings indicated that Black males have the lowest graduation rate among all males in every racial/ethnic category and that only 16% of these students graduate in three years. These tenebrous statistics are particularly significant in that community college is the primary entry point into postsecondary education for Black men (Perrakis, 2008). Poor rates of persistence, graduation, and academic achievement have led to harsh criticism of community colleges. Bush (2004) noted that community colleges have failed to support the upward social improvement of Black males who see the community college as a venue to improve their livelihoods. Therefore, community college Black Male Initiatives and other resources designed to foster persistence and degree attainment for this population are relevant and imperative.

Educational inequality is one of the most challenging public policy issues for the United States, largely due to its implications for social justice. Chances for a quality life depend heavily on education, making the focus on equalizing opportunities for educational success of utmost importance. The consequences for not eradicating such inequalities could be very costly for the nation. An equitable and world class education has benefits, not only for the students involved, but for citizens and the larger society as

well. The achievement gap leads to inequities and other costs to the nation. These costs come in the form of lower economic growth and higher costs of public services, such as criminal justice and public assistance. Therefore, we can view efforts to improve educational outcomes for Black males in higher education as a public investment, thereby yielding benefits in excess of the costs.

The United States will benefit tremendously by providing resources and promoting efforts to address the existing achievement gap in higher education between Black males and their counterparts. Students that persist and graduate are less likely to need public assistance. Baum, Ma, and Payea's "Education Pays" report (2013) indicated that in 2011, Medicaid participation rates were 19% for those with some college but no degree, 17% for those with an associate degree, and 9% for those with at least a four-year college degree. Furthermore, earning a college degree is financially beneficial over a lifetime as college graduates are forecasted to earn significantly more income than high school graduates. The median lifetime earnings of individuals with an associate degree and those with some college education but no degree (a category that includes certificate holders) are 27% and 13% higher, respectively, than the median earnings of high school graduates (Baum et al. , 2013). Colleges and universities across the country that focus on the plight of Black male achievement are directly and indirectly contributing to the overall success of the nation. We all stand to benefit by increasing the number of Black male college graduates.

In response to these conditions and to create opportunities for student success, many institutions and government agencies have implemented interventions through programming and policies designed to close this achievement gap. Furthermore,

educators and other policy makers have advanced educational arguments supporting the design, implementation, and funding of programs and policies that seek to provide research-based support and resources to improve Black men's postsecondary education completion rates. In February 2014, as a part of President Obama's plan to make 2014 a year of action focused on expanding opportunity for all Americans, the President unveiled the "My Brother's Keeper" initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential (White House, 2015). As part of the initiative's launch, President Obama also established the My Brother's Keeper Task Force to review public and private sector programs, policies, and strategies to determine ways the Federal Government could better support efforts designed to combat this problem.

In addition to national efforts, institutions across the country are responding to this educational crisis through formal retention programs and initiatives, often referred to as Black Male Initiatives, that seek to improve equity and to positively influence educational outcomes. In a study by Spradley (2001), he argued that increasing the number of traditional age Black men in higher education will require educators to design special programs to address their needs. He recommended that administrators facilitate peer intervention and a learning environment that encourages participation and nurturing by designing extracurricular activities that enhance learning and participation. For example, the Center for Male Engagement (CME) at the Community College of Philadelphia is a program staffed with full-time, professional Support Coaches and their efforts range from outreach to Black males in high school to summer enrichment programs to enhance the educational outcomes for their Black Male students. These

initiatives are not just administered at individual campuses, but many are now coordinated from a system or state level in order to reach as many Black males as possible. Examples of such efforts can be found within the University System of Georgia (USG) and the City University of New York (CUNY) System. USG has implemented a Black Male Initiative that provides a variety of campus-based services, programs, and outreach efforts at over 25 of its public community colleges and four-year institutions. The CUNY Black Male Initiative coordinates the system's efforts to improve the representation and success of their Black male students. Each campus has a coordinator that oversees student development, career development, academic enrichment, and mentoring programs. One of their most noteworthy initiatives is their annual distinguished speaker series and conferences held that bring together students, faculty, and national experts. These are just a few initiatives that have been implemented over the past decade and by no means a full-scale picture of what they do and accomplish.

Most of the research on Black males is focused on trying to understand why such a disproportionate number of Black males perform so poorly in college (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). Harper & Davis (2012) advocate a different approach: "Necessary is the pursuit of additional narratives from those who can give voice to their educational values, philosophies and values" (p.117). More specifically, Harper (2012) stated, "the most disappointing finding in the National Black Male Achievement Study was that few participants had been consulted for helpful and potentially instructive insights into success" (p. 19). Howard, Flennaugh, and Terry (2012) postulate there is limited scholarship that places students' voices at the forefront of examination, and that such lack of scholarship is severely inadequate for serving the interests of Black male students.

Even though Howard's (2008) study used narratives to capture how Black males navigate higher education to degree attainment, he called for further examination of students' narratives to better understand how Black males experience college success. Research gaps exist as they relate to Black male community college degree attainment and examining their perspectives regarding their experiences as students. Additional research and evidence is needed on the overall experiences of Black males in community colleges, more specifically the experiences of those participating in programs designed to support retention and degree attainment.

Anti-Deficit Approach

As Harper (2012) passionately argues, "Black men's dismal college enrollments, disengagement, underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues in American higher education" (Harper, 2012, p. 3). More disturbing than the challenges to Black male success in higher education, are the approaches educators and policymakers use to address these challenges. Deficit studies reiterate the failure and low performance of Black male undergraduates but rarely provide insight into the experiences of successful Black men. Deficit studies focus on Black men's shortcomings, without offering nuanced explanations as to why so many are low performing or alternatively investigating why many Black males are, in fact, successful (Bush & Bush, 2004; Harper, 2010; Harper, 2012, 2014; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). Examining Black male success through an anti-deficit lens provides a healthier critique and a refreshing departure from deficit-based scholarship. Anti-deficit scholars acknowledge that Black male success in higher education has been thwarted by

institutional factors and racism, thereby amplifying what Harper (2010) calls the "instead-of" hypothesis. Instead of exploring how Black men fail to succeed, anti-deficit scholarship, particularly in the context of Black male collegians, "pursues insights into strategies these [successful Black male] students employ to resist the internalization of discouraging misconceptions about members of their racial groups and how they manage to respond productively to stereotypes" (Harper, 2010, p. 69).

Research grounded in anti-deficit thinking is necessary to produce new narratives that counter the prevalence of deficit discourse about Black male students, if any significant social or educational change is to be realized for these men (Brown, 2011; Brown & Donnor, 2011). Brown (2011) conducted a historical analysis of the literature on Black males from the 1930s to the present and discovered an abundance of research that centered on the educational and social deficits of Black males. Brown alluded to the necessity for new, anti-deficit questions to be posed to diversify and expand upon the existing, recurring narratives of Black men as absent and wandering, impotent and powerless, soulful and adaptive, and endangered and in crisis. Palmer and Yung's (2008) discussion on anti-deficit thinking toward Black males also raises the need to end the one-sided, deficit appellation associated with Black men. In opposition to the deficit thinking largely used to produce scholarship on Black male achievement, this study employs an anti-deficit model of thinking to highlight factors associated with Black male student success and their community college experiences. It is difficult to avoid comparisons when providing context for inequitable outcomes, however an over-emphasis on these associations is counterproductive. According to Harper (2010), the mere fact that Black male success, or lack thereof, is typically framed relative to their

White counterparts perpetuates the deficit-approach in research. To the layman, these comparisons suggest that Black males are given equal opportunities to participate in higher education. Black males often lack the support necessary to overcome their specific challenges and barriers to achieving their educational goals. This study forgoes comparing Black males' educational experiences with others. Alternatively, it focuses on their sense of agency alongside the responsibility of institutions to improve educational outcomes for these men.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study seeks to understand the experiences of former Black male members of a community college BMI, regarding social, personal, and academic support and achievement. Understanding and retelling the experiences of these students will help administrators, program coordinators, and other decision makers adopt policies and processes that will enable Black male students to succeed in college. The intent is to gain a deep understanding of student experiences as members of a BMI and simultaneously to promote an awareness of Black male student success at the community college. Gleaning personal accounts from student members about non-cognitive experiences that they perceived were associated with their success in college will provide empirical data. This data can be used to inform institutional policy, climate, resource allocation, and program development for Black males aimed at strengthening retention, persistence, and completion rates.

Study Significance

The vast majority of Black males (and Black students in general) are enrolled in community colleges. For those Black males attending public colleges, the selection of

post-secondary institutions is overwhelmingly in favor of community colleges, where 70.5% of them enroll (Wood & Harrison, 2014). Community colleges are lacking in providing equitable opportunities for Black male students to achieve success (Bush & Bush, 2010; Harris & Wood, 2013; Vasquez & Wood, 2014; Wood, 2014). In response, universities and community colleges across the nation are implementing programs to support the success of this large, yet often unsuccessful population of students. To this end, the data collected and analyzed from this study will be an important contribution to research on this topic. This study will provide insights that can aid policymakers, higher education practitioners, and scholars in better understanding how to address the unique needs of Black males in community colleges through success programs with data-driven designs. Community colleges remain central to conversations within the higher education and policy communities around "student success." For these conversations to be productive and foster change, they must begin and end with the student as the focus. To this end, the findings from this study will hopefully place Black male students as a priority in institutional policy and practice conversations and lead the way to improved outcomes and a more equitable distribution of opportunity.

Conversations at the institutional level must shift from discussing a new program or technique for supporting underrepresented populations to an evaluation of beliefs, expectations, values, and practices, which then create or perpetuate unequal outcomes and instead focus on the possibility for reversing inequalities (Bensimon, 2005). Malcolm-Piqueux and Bensimon (2017) argue that framing inequity as an institutional problem rather than continually finding fault with already marginalized students underscores the need for equity-minded practices, which include race consciousness,

focus on the campus, data-driven strategies, awareness, and action orientation. Institutional agents are seldom approached as the primary source for improvement, and qualitative research is necessary to highlight not only what is not working regarding practice, but also what Black males indicate works exceptionally well among educational practitioners (Bensimon, 2007). The findings from this study provided insight into the experiences of these young men as it relates to BMI programs and their experiences with institutional agents and policies that both covertly and overtly support student success as well as galvanize unequal outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study is Wood and Harris's Five Domains (2014), a model that illustrates the elements that influence success for men of color in community colleges. Wood and Harris (2014) posited that student success outcomes are shaped by interactions between pre-college considerations occurring prior to Black men entering community college and five dynamic and interrelated domains that manifest during their enrollment in community college. The five domains are as follows: 1) academic; 2) environmental; 3) non-cognitive; 4) institutional; and, 5) social domains. Specifically, the current study uses this conceptual framework to structure the analysis of participant experiences in each of these domains. Through this lens, the researcher attends to experiences and sense making within the domains while remaining open to the influence of other elements.

The literature revealed that addressing issues of persistence and retention among Black males attending community college requires a paradigm shift in the approach to understanding these phenomena (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Scores of studies have been

conducted to investigate the persistence of college students and much of this research has been conducted examining traditional students attending four-year institutions. For example, Astin (1968, 1975) and Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) created models of student retention based on the idea of successful persistence, which is the ability of a student to academically and socially integrate into the campus environment. Other scholars, however, continuing this strand research found that commuter students and nontraditional students—who share many of the same academic, background, and environmental circumstances as community college students—differed from four-year students in that they had various environmental and socioeconomic factors that greatly impacted their ability to persist (e.g., Bean & Metzner,1985; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978, 1980, 1995). This shift in the focus of student population influenced scholars to conduct research specific to students attending community college. However, this research did not accurately reflect the experiences of Black males attending community college, as this group continues to have the lowest persistence and completion rates among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups (Williams, 2019). Within the context of this study, Wood and Harris (2014) developed the Five Domains framework. Unlike other conceptual frames, their framework was developed from a synthesis of literature that focused on the specific experiences and characteristics of community college men of color.

Given the topic of this dissertation study and what is known about the intersections of race, gender, culture, and institution when studying student experiences in higher education, one might ask why Critical Race Theory (CRT) or Yosso's theory of Cultural Wealth are not used as theoretical or conceptual foundations. Through the lens of CRT, it can be argued that the cultures of men of color can nurture and empower them

(Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2002). However, culture was not the focus of this study. Instead, the focus was on how BMIs assisted male students of color attending a community college in navigating higher education by further developing their knowledge, skills, and confidence in their ability to achieve success. People of Color draw on various social and psychological "critical navigational skills" (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998) to maneuver through structures of inequality permeated by racism (Pierce, 1974, 1989, 1995). Navigational capital acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints, but it also connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation through places and spaces, including schools, the job market, health care, and judicial systems (Williams, 1997). Taking an anti-deficit approach to investigating the experiences of successful Black community college men, the study assumes the men to possess the navigational capital that allowed them to successfully matriculate through community college and beyond. He also contends that various forms of capital were strengthened as a result of their participation in a BMI. To this end, the goal of the study was not to focus on the various types of oppressive structures the participants encountered and the forms of capital they possessed, but how the community college structure and BMI helped them to identify, utilize, and further develop the cultural capital that they possessed upon arriving to the community college.

Employing the Five Domains situates Black male student voices as experts, contributes to the research that influence show institutions foster environments conducive to success for men of color. This study seeks to make educational leaders aware of the importance of purposefully incorporating race and gender-specific programming,

dedicated spaces, and institutional practices that are proven to be effective in improving the success of Black male students.

Summary of Methodology

This study follows Merriam's (2009) basic interpretive qualitative design. A semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interview was conducted with each participant. The semi-structured interview format was selected due to the inherent flexibility to probe and retrieve more detailed information from participants (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2009). Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The researcher employed multiple methods of ensuring the trustworthiness of data collection and analysis.

Limitations

As with any research, this study has limitations. These limitations are not uncommon in qualitative research and will be mitigated by employing trustworthiness techniques.

This research employs purposeful sampling of Black male graduates from two large community colleges located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, which may limit the generalizability of the study to other campus environments. Eleven participants were selected to participate in this study, and this does not represent a wide range of diverse Black male student experiences, particularly not those of students in rural areas and those in other regions of the United States. Transferability of the study is limited to similar contexts and the participant voices are not intended to serve as a universal narrative of Black male community college experiences.

Participant recruitment was another limitation to be acknowledged. Since the participants are graduates, they were no longer attending the community college or participating in the BMI program. Subsequently, contacting these men to invite them to participate required the researcher to rely heavily on the connections that students maintained with BMI program staff in order to mitigate this limitation. These connections provided the researcher with access to current contact information for each person being invited to participate in the research.

An additional study limitation is researcher bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher's personal knowledge of community college students and BMI programs created a link between he and the participants. Such a link that could have influenced the interpretation of the data, potentially failing to probe participants to share more detail regarding some of their responses about topics with which he was familiar. The limitation of researcher bias and reactivity was mitigated by collecting what Maxwell (2013) calls rich data. By retrieving in-depth responses from participants and probing for more information, even when the researcher was familiar with the topic, the impact of his subjectivity on the research findings was diminished.

Finally, other phenomena which are not explored in the current study may have an impact on the results. For example, students who have parents that attended college or participated in a secondary college preparatory program may share characteristics that predisposed them to experiences and situations that fostered student success. It is impossible to understand or account for every construct which might influence the phenomenon under investigation, making lack of attention to parental education a limitation of the current study.

Definition of Terms

Academic Success: The desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from the beginning year through degree completion.

Black: A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

Black Male Initiative: programs/initiatives that focus on minority male mentoring, recruitment, persistence, and completion.

Self-efficacy: The belief in one's capabilities to achieve college goals (Harris & Wood, 2016).

Sense of belonging: Defined as students' perception of mattering to campus personnel as felt by being validated and respected; the level of campus support and feelings of connectedness to the institution (Strayhorn, 2012a).

Conclusion

Significant attention has been given to individual and institutional barriers that occur in the community college setting that impact educational outcomes of Black males (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Smith Morest, 2013; Vasquez & Wood, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013a). Other relevant variables that also affect educational outcomes are college preparation, high school dropout rates, fatherhood, underemployment, crime, and poverty. While these variables have been emphasized in previous research, it is beneficial for this current study to reveal the perceptions of Black male students' community college experiences as members of a BMI.

Community college leaders have an ethical responsibility to Black males and to the nation to reduce inequitable outcomes and to promote a vibrant and healthy citizenry and economy, making it critically important to investigate the experiences of Black male

achievers. It is beneficial to understand how they make meaning of their community college experience and what tools and resources they found useful and beneficial along the way. This is an important step toward remedying the problem of inequitable educational outcomes for Black males. The following chapters of this dissertation present the existing literature on Black males' community college experiences, Black Male Initiatives, the study methodology, findings from this research, and a discussion that includes implications and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature on Black males in community colleges. The researcher engaged in literature synthesis to conduct this review. Literature synthesis is a process by which research literature is collected, annotated, and synthesized for themes (Turner et al., 2008). The researcher adopted as his conceptual framework Wood and Harris's Five Domains (2014), which influence success for Black men in community colleges.

Scholars have researched Blacks in the community college since the 1970s, which has resulted in a body of literature that addresses a wide variety of topics, utilizes diverse methodologies, and delivers influential findings and practical recommendations for policy and practice. Conducting social science research is very complex and tedious work. Therefore, gaining lucidity in social science inquiry requires meticulous efforts on behalf of social science researchers. While the research is examining many different phenomena related to Black males in community colleges, each researcher is adding valuable knowledge in order to build a more comprehensive view.

Periodically, researchers need to synthesize research literature in any given field in order to apprise academicians and practitioners on the condition of the field (Patterson, Thorne, Canam, & Jillings, 2001). It is also necessary as a way to be cognizant of the tenure of scholarship on Black males and the variety of issues addressed. Thus, this chapter will synthesize literature pertaining to Black males in community colleges to provide scholars and practitioners with practical knowledge informed by research on this topic.

As a result of the literature review process, several emergent themes were extracted and used as scaffolding for a succinct and reader friendly synthesis of the literature on Black males' success in community colleges. Additionally, the Five Domains of Black male student success in community colleges proposed by Wood and Harris (2014) served as a conceptual framework for reviewing and synthesizing the literature. Wood and Harris (2014) posited that student success outcomes are shaped by interactions between pre-college considerations and five dynamic and interrelated domains that manifest during their enrollment in community college. Applying the five domains enable me to systematically synthesize and discuss the key arguments and research findings emerging from the published literature. The five domains are as follows: 1) academic; 2) environmental; 3) non-cognitive; 4) institutional; and, 5) social domains.

Introduction

This review begins with a broad discussion of primary retention and then focuses more closely on the retention of Black male students and the programs designed to support their success at community colleges. Although there appears to be no shortage of research on varying aspects of retention and academic achievement as it relates to students in general, literature that focuses primarily on Black male student success and retention in community colleges, was limited. Future qualitative studies in the area of retention and academic achievement for Black males are recommended so that the experiences of participants can be examined in greater depth.

Harper points out that in reading such research, "Anyone who takes time to read about them could confidently conclude that Black male undergraduates are troubled, their

future is bleak, they all do poorly, and there is little that can be done to reverse longstanding outcomes disparities that render them among the least likely to succeed in college" (Harper, 2009a, pp. 699-700). Dismal college enrollments, disengagement, underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues for Black males in higher education today and has been for many years.

Additionally, they often face issues related to insufficient academic preparation, culturally unresponsive campus environments, severe underrepresentation, inadequate funding, low motivation, and a lack of academic and personal goal setting and planning. Far too many Black students, particularly males, tend to emerge from high school largely uninterested in or unprepared for college work (Orfield et al., 2004). For these students already scarred by the educational system, higher education can be perceived more as a secret society than a democratic opportunity for success (Cross & Slater, 2000; Hopkins, 1997; Polite & Davis, 1999). To combat these conditions and create opportunities for student success, many institutions have implemented interventions through programming and policies that have accomplished documented success in terms of student outcomes and closing the achievement gap.

Over the last 50 years, colleges and universities have undergone major changes in demographics, including evolving from a traditional to a more non-traditional and diverse student population on many campuses. With this evolution came significant challenges in retaining these new and growing student populations. Much of the earlier research on retention has been assessed through the lens of traditional students. This possibly accounts for "the ineffective methodologies and particularly questionable applications for

predicting the performance of Black students" (Sherman, Giles, & Williams-Green 1994, p. 164). Readjusting the lens with which we view and assess Black students and finding new ways to assist them in achieving in higher education, and often on predominately white campuses, is essential. This type of adjustment and assistance is particularly needed on majority campuses where the retention rates are being described as dismal and the academic achievement of many Black students is seen as questionable and confounding. Ultimately, the aim of this review is to uncover the significant influences and variables that have aided the persistence and retention of minority students, such as Black males.

Statement of the Problem

For any institution to solve a problem, there must be an understanding of the issues. Then, it must work continuously to improve the processes that caused the problem. Studies have shown that regular assessment of the efficiency of institutional activities creates a foundation that allows groups to respond to changing demands of the students' needs with a planned approach (Kaye & Anderson, 1999; Chamblis, 2003). It is also well established that consistent evaluation creates a culture of evidence that allows the institution to constantly gain information about itself, and then institutions can use the information to continually improve its management processes that will satisfy students' needs (Leveille, 2006).

Over the years, university administrators have failed to understand and research the financial and social implications that retention has on their institutions (Hurd, 2000). This lack of understanding has created almost uniform results in that Black males on campuses have difficulty becoming socially integrated. And it seems very little has been

done to better manage their academic careers and improve their participation and degree completion (Davis, 1999; Cuyjet, 2006).

In general, leadership for retention initiatives is critical when developing an integrated approach that will continuously improve the retention process, improve departmental operational efficiencies, and ultimately improve the graduation rates for Black males. Improving the current system requires improvements not only in the individual units but also departments that contribute to Black male student retention (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997).

Retention

Student retention is a frequently discussed and commonly studied phenomenon in higher education. Retention is the "ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation" (Seidman, 2005, p. 14). The retention rate for any group of students is a performance indicator that allows institutions to demonstrate quality, satisfy the stakeholders' need for improvement and accountability, and enhances the institutional capability to make informed decisions on policies, programs, and personnel (Bogue, 1998).

A low retention rate for any institution is damaging and should be disconcerting for both the administration and community it serves. A low rate is often an indication of the ineffectiveness of an institution in managing the progress of its students to graduate within the time indicated. It also has negative implications for the students who drop out. The institution's reputation is compromised, and revenues that could be generated for academic and student services are lost (Leveille, 2006; Tinto, 1993). According to Swail Reed, and Perna (2004), when an institution loses a student, it reduces its income over the

years. The institution also loses revenue from bookstores, residential halls, financial aid, campus restaurants, and potentially lost alumni contributions (Swail et. al, 2004). Many institutions have recognized that improving their retention rates is contingent upon a unified planning process that spans academics, services, resources, and ultimately the university at large.

Research has established that improvements in all areas of the campus, such as financial aid, faculty and peer support, campus activity and mentors at the institution, must work together to improve student experience. Students who departed from universities before graduation spoke about the disorganization on the campuses, financial aid issues, problems with bureaucratic red tape, and poor customer service, which severely impacted their departure (Hurd, 2000). A report from the Consortium for Student Data Exchange (2004) found that institutions lose 20 % of its students in the first year, 11 % in the second year, and 9 % in the third year. This data makes it apparent that retention rates must be a primary focus for universities and should be integrated into their institutional mission. Some universities have established institutional strategies, such as academic support services, remediation, counseling and retention centers, career services, emergency loans and merit-based scholarships, and private and corporate donations. These programs are aimed at developing academic skills through social skills development and providing financial services (Chenoweth, 1999; Jones-Giles, 2004). Many students reported benefits from these programs, such as improved grades, enhanced sense of self-worth, and the ability to persevere in school (Marshall, 2005). Although these services may benefit the general needs of the student population, they do not address the different requirements of minorities on campus.

Minorities on campuses will face obstacles that the general student population won't encounter. Resources such as academic support and retention services should be designed to address the problems faced by these groups (Cuyjet, 1997). According to Fortson (1997), many general programs have not increased the retention rates significantly because they do not demonstrate their effectiveness in addressing the specific factors of background, low income, and social expectations faced by minorities such as Black men. According to Nettie, McDill, and McPartland (1994), the common problem of creating ineffective, wide-ranging programs have trapped many institutions into a cycle in which students participate in programs, but as they improve and move out of the programs, the gains are lost.

According to Tinto (2000), institutions should consider more than the overall graduation rates of minorities. Instead, they should examine retention improvements in smaller groups such as low income, traditional, first generation, and nontraditional students to see if their persistence rates have increased with time. Davis (1999) concurred that improvements in the current retention rates on campuses require a collective effort to nurture the Black male from his junior year in high school to his senior year in college. Monitoring a student from the time they are accepted by the institution provides the institution with information to offer the necessary services to accommodate the student's needs. These studies suggest that Black male retention can be improved by focusing on strengthening integration, student involvement and commitment, and utilizing a planned approach to problem solving.

Reframing Black Male Student Success

National interest on the plight of Black males has resulted in numerous conference sessions, think tanks, journal articles, books, and editorials dedicated to exploring the intricate factors impacting this group (Harper, 2010). The proliferation of campus and district level initiatives designed to increase the entry and success of men of color comes as a result of community college leaders who are participating in a larger discourse on the disparate success among minority men (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Black male success has traditionally been viewed through a deficit lens (Harper, 2012). The research questions have traditionally centered on the negative experiences Black males have had with schooling, such as low college attendance and degree attainment rates. Researchers have tended to focus on questions that examine why Black males are not experiencing success in K-12 schooling and in higher education. However, while the numbers are alarmingly low, we know that there are Black males that are experiencing success in the educational systems. Dr. Shaun Harper countered this commonly held deficit perspective by investigating Black male success through an anti-deficit model, a model that seeks to understand the factors that contribute to the success of Black males. He lays the foundation for his transformational research in his 2012 National Black Male College Achievement study providing a rationale for this trend changing work:

> These are pressing problems that indisputably warrant ongoing scholarly examination, aggressive intervention, strategic institutional leadership, greater transparency and accountability, and bold policy responses. However, also needed are instructive insights from Black men who have experienced college differently—those who actually enrolled, were actively engaged inside and outside the classroom, did well academically, graduated, and went on to pursue additional degrees beyond the baccalaureate. (p. 7)

Few scholars have taken the interest or time to examine why some Black males defy the odds so seemingly stacked against them and manage to thrive and succeed both in K-12 schools and in higher education. There are countless studies that illustrate the obstacles and challenges faced by this population. Harper, in his 2012 article on Black male achievement, states, "In light of all this, little is known about Black male students who graduate from high school, enroll in college, aspire to earn degrees beyond the baccalaureate, and espouse commitments to various career pathways in the field of education" (p. 105). The questions remain as to what compels these Black men to care so much about their education despite what is routinely reported in the media and in scholarly literature about their marginal academic achievement, loss of interest in schooling, and their comparatively lower rates of degree attainment and presence in corporate America.

Despite inequities, Harper and Davis (2012) reported finding that the successful Black college men in their study revered education as the great equalizer. They realized that they would have been caught in a cycle of poverty and oppression had they not attended college and earned a degree (Harper & Davis, 2012). They go on to report that these men's views on education as liberating and door-opening was largely shaped by their parents or other family members (Harper & Davis, 2012).

Pre-College Considerations

Research has shown that past experiences have lingering effects on Black students, and sometimes such experiences are carried over into the college experience, creating behaviors that are different from other demographic groups (Cuyet, 1997). Many college bound Black students come from disadvantaged backgrounds. They do not have

parents who attended college, often lack positive educational role models, are from single parent homes, and are first generation college students. Black students are more likely to be from lower income families, have limited financial resources, have problems with finances and the financial aid system, and feel isolated on campus (Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 1993). They are also less prepared for college, are faced with more problems in college, and are negatively affected by increases in college tuition more than students of wealthier families (Muraskin & Lee, 2004). Further, they have significantly lower academic preparation in foreign languages, mathematics, and science than their four-year counterparts (Wood, 2011b). When placed in an institutional environment, they are immediately at a disadvantage. These inequities are not trivial in nature. Rather, they call for support and interventions specifically designed to meet the needs of Black men in community colleges (Wood & Williams, 2013).

The population of any institution is composed of students who come from different social and economic backgrounds with different personalities and pre-college preparation levels. According to Tinto (1993), students' behaviors are modified based on their interaction within the college environment. A negative or positive interaction will influence the student's commitment, possibly precipitating marginality or even withdrawal. The student's academic and social integration is a psychological process, which is shaped through the student's past behaviors, coping abilities, and self-efficacy towards academics (Bean & Eaton, 1995). According to Davis (1999), "Black males often struggle to socially integrate in a community of peers who are supportive and is often confining. They struggle to overcome academic hurdles, created by inadequate college preparation. They struggle against a school environment that marginalizes their

presence and academic expectations… often their voices are not heard, misunderstood or simply ignored" (p.135). Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest (2003) found that Black boys are usually misunderstood from as early as middle school because teachers tend to perceive Black culture styles as lower in achievement, higher in aggression, and more likely to need special education than those individuals who have normal behavior styles. Davis (1999) went further to say that the effect of racism, stereotyping, underachievement in reading and mathematics, low teacher expectations, negative peer pressure, anti-schooling attitudes, drugs, gang involvement, and the legal systems and the lack of positive male influence greatly influenced Black male behavior and educational experiences. These circumstances can be detrimental to the Black male's post-secondary experience.

The extent to which students become involved in the institutional environment and exploit the opportunities available will reflect on their academic success. The college population is made up of a diverse group of students. Stokes (2005) reported that the traditional undergraduate students, who are dependent, attend school full-time, and work part-time, have changed dramatically over the past two decades. The traditional age 18 to 22-year-old undergraduate students make up only 16% of higher education enrollment. Approximately 40% of students are 25 years or older and 40% of students study part-time. Non-traditional students, on the other hand, have the characteristics of delayed enrollment, attend school part-time, are independent and work full-time while enrolled. They often have children, are single parents, and may not have received a high school diploma. Obviously traditional and non-traditional students do not exhibit similar retention patterns at the bachelor's degree level (NCES, 2002).

Students with non-traditional characteristics are more likely to leave without obtaining a degree and are a greater risk of dropping out, especially in their first year. Male non-traditional students at an urban commuter college found that competing jobs, classroom priorities, poor time management, and academic under-preparedness contributed to the dropout decision (Orfield, 2004). Non-traditional students' energy is more focused on their employment rather than on school (Conditions of Education Report, 2002). Nontraditional students also fear returning to academics. They struggle to balance family and school, facing financial difficulties that cannot be remedied by the financial aid process (Widoff, 2000).

The Non-Cognitive Domain

The non-cognitive domain captures students' affective and emotional responses to social contexts and person– environment interactions that take place within or intersect their college experiences (Wood & Harris, 2014). Two variables that fall within the non-cognitive domain, sense of belonging and identity, emerged as important factors in the published research on student success for men of color in community colleges (Wood & Williams, 2013).

The ways in which identity influences student success for Black men in community colleges is emerging as a major area of focus in the scholarly literature. Gardenshire-Crooks et al. (2010) highlight the complex nature of identity and its intersection with student success factors for Black males in community colleges. This study found that students believed it was important to earn money and support their families while being enrolled in community college. Even though they recognized it could have deleterious effects on their academic achievement, they still felt compelled to

prioritize work above school because they viewed work as central to their identities as males. The participants in the study also reported hesitation in seeking academic, personal, or financial assistance while in college because they viewed these help-seeking behaviors as contrary to how they have been socialized to express their masculinities, especially in the area of independence.

Wood and Essien-Wood's (2012) qualitative study looked at the ways in which capitalistic values shaped racial and gender identities for Black college men. The study sought to understand how these values promoted attitudes and behaviors among this population that negatively affect their success in community college. The conceptual framework guiding this study is referred to as the concept of capital identity projection. They describe this concept as a "harmful psychosocial disposition that occurs when an image of economic success is projected to the point of one's own detriment" (p. 987). They found that capitalistic value systems construct images of Black masculinity that prioritize countercultural behaviors, which subconsciously encouraged them to embrace attitudes and behaviors that reinforced stereotypes assigned to Black men. The participants found themselves bombarded with messages that were very contrary to those that foster student success. These value systems sent the messages that being thugs, hustlers, pimps, and gangsters is more advantageous than being good students or working professionals.

Sense of belonging is another major theme identified in the literature as being an important variable in fostering success for Black men in community college. Within the scholarship on Black men in community colleges, Perrakis (2008) found that sense of belonging was a key factor that influenced achievement for men. This finding suggests

that, in addition to other factors that researchers have found to be important predictors of success in community college, having a meaningful connection to the campus is essential to achievement for male community college students. Sense of belonging is defined as "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or others on campus" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Hurtado and Carter (1997) underscore how a sense of belonging is preeminent in the retention, achievement, and success of students of color in postsecondary education. Plainly stated, when Black men feel a sense of belonging or connectedness to the institution, they are more likely to maximize their potential and persist through to completion.

Mentoring should also be considered as an important variable in promoting a sense of belonging for Black men in postsecondary settings. Mentoring is a valuable structured tool that is used to promote interaction between Black men and faculty (LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). From their observation of mentoring programs in higher education institutions throughout the country, LaVant et al. (1997) recommend that successful mentoring programs for Black men should have the commitment of the institution's executive leadership to have a formal mentoring program. A university committee should be established to identify Black males for mentorship upon admission. Mentors who are passionate should be selected, and there must be coordination between the mentoring program and enrollment management to identify potential participants. Training should be provided for faculty, and the program must engage the university's external partners. There must be an ongoing unbiased analysis and evaluation of the

program. Recommendations from the evaluations must be implemented to improve the programs' effectiveness (LaVant et al., 1997).

The importance of significant relationships is echoed across the published literature. For example, Ross (1998) found that Black males graduate because of nurturing by a significant person and by bonding to a person who provides a strong sense of direction, guidance and responsibility. This person may be someone from church, family, or the institution the student attends who is caring to the student. Similarly, Mustiful (2005) found that Black males persist because of individuals such as parents and grandparents who provided financial and emotional support. The study also found that high school personnel and institutional factors, such as financial aid, support of faculty and peers, involvement in campus activities, and mentors at the institution all contribute to the persistence and success for Black males.

The Social Domain

Variables related to students' social integration in the campus context are situated in the social domain (Wood & Harris, 2014). Tinto (1993) indicates that students' decisions to persist are influenced largely by the extent to which they are socially integrated within the institution, by way of friendships, informal discussions with peers, and extracurricular activities. The research on social integration is very prominent in the student success paradigm, yet its applicability to non-traditional students (e.g., adult learners and community college students) has been questioned by scholars. Findings from three studies I reviewed argue that social integration experiences do not have a positive influence on success for Black men in community colleges.

One of the key findings from Wood's (2012) study of academic and social integration among Black community college men was that social integration had a negative effect on persistence for participants. Additionally, Strayhorn's (2012b) study on the impact of social and academic integration on Black men's satisfaction in community colleges revealed that men who were more socially integrated at their institutions were less satisfied than those who were less socially integrated. Finally, participants in Bush and Bush's (2010) study believed that their relationships with their Black peers were counterproductive, rather than facilitative, to their success as college students. The point illustrated here is central to the importance of scholarly research in the area of Black community college men. What appears to foster success in the case of majority students may not always foster success for all students.

The Environmental Domain

Environmental factors tend to direct students' time, attention, and resources away from their college endeavors (Wood & Harris, 2014). This domain includes factors that impact students from outside of the campus context, subsequently having a direct influence on Black Men's engagement and success in community colleges. In two studies, Black community college men report working off campus and family responsibilities as factors that negatively impact engagement and success (Freeman & Huggans, 2009; Mason 1998). In Mason's (1998) study, students reported experiencing environmental challenges related to crime, poverty, and financial need. Having clearly defined educational goals helped lower stress and foster higher levels of commitment to persistence and completion.

Many scholars investigate the impact of environmental variables on student departure and practitioners are often very interested in this domain as it contains factors believed to "make or break" a student when it comes to student success. Surprisingly, employment was found to be conducive to academic success for Black men in community colleges (Wood, Hilton, & Lewis, 2011). Wood et al. (2011) found that employment was conducive to student success but only when the following two conditions were met: when students viewed their employment as being related to their academic course work and when students worked to gain work experience rather than for the sole purpose of financing their education. Another interesting finding regarding student employment was lifted from my review of the same study. When students' employment limited the number of courses they could take, they were 66.2% less likely to perceive employment as having a positive impact on their success. Contrary to popular belief, the findings suggest that student employment is not necessarily an obstacle to persistence and retention in community college. Instead, it can be beneficial when it is aligned with academic and career goals.

The Academic Domain

According to Wood and Harris (2014), the academic domain encompasses variables that are directly related to students' academic experiences and, as a result, shape academic outcomes in community colleges. Examples of these variables include attending class regularly (Mason, 1998), academic integration (Flowers, 2006), attending school full time (Freeman & Huggans, 2009; Hagedorn et al., 2001), choosing a major course of study (Hagedorn et al., 2001), and using academic services (Glenn, 2003; Mason, 1998). The research reviewed that fell within the academic domain generally

conclude that Black men at two-year institutions tend to be less academically integrated than their peers who attend four-year institutions, particularly when experiences such as participating in study groups, interacting with faculty members outside of class, and meeting with academic advisors are considered (Wood & Williams, 2013). Bush and Bush (2010) noted that students who have greater and more positive interactions with faculty are significantly more likely to achieve academically and persist than those who do not.

Wood's (2012b) study produced some very interesting insights in reference to the academic domain. His goal was to better understand the relationship between academic outcomes and six-year persistence and attainment rates among Black men in community colleges. His findings indicate that students had significantly greater odds of persistence and attainment if they received an incomplete in a course, repeated a course for a higher grade, or met with a faculty member. Wood hypothesized that receiving an incomplete in a course sets the stage for students to engage with faculty since they must be proactive in making the request. This could explain this very interesting phenomenon. He also discovered that course withdrawal after the add/drop deadline significantly decreased students' likelihood of persistence or attainment. The general conclusion adopted by scholars is that student success outcomes for Black men in community colleges are shaped heavily by the extent to which they become immersed in the academic experience (Wood & Williams, 2013). It is evident in the research that scholars have come to believe that institutions shoulder a great deal of responsibility in creating and maintaining campus environments that encourage Black males to adopt scholarly practices that lead to success and completion.

The Institutional Domain

Advising, tutoring, mentoring, counseling, remedial courses, schedule adjustment, and financial aid, respectively, are considered the most effective strategies for correcting many of the issues faced by Black students (Harleston, 2005). A similar study by Jones-Giles (2004) found that the most effective polices in improving retention were screening potential dropouts for prevention and intervention, providing academic counseling to potential dropouts, and implementing student and faculty feedback to identify students who are likely to withdraw. Jones-Giles (2004) also found that establishing policies at the departmental level to handle retention issues and using information from exit interviews to identify factors that impact the student withdrawal improves student retention. Glenn (2004) found that the best strategies include freshman only advising, offering credits for orientation courses and tutorial programs, and monitoring at-risk groups with specific retention plans. The study also found that the strategies that had the greatest impact on Black male retention were identifying at-risk students from the time of enrollment and monitoring their academic performance. According to Tinto (2000), for institutional retention programs to impact the sophomore, junior, and senior years, a learning community approach must be utilized. This creates a program that has continued success throughout the students' academic career.

There are barriers to university participation for both traditional and non-traditional students. Marshall (2005) found that traditional students utilize the retention programs less. Factors contributing to students' lack of using the services stem from cultural beliefs regarding the stigma associated with seeking help. The study also found institutional factors, such as peer tutors lacking diversity skills, ineffective marketing of

services, and the negative connotation associated with the word retention impacts program utilization. Marshall (2005) found that in order to improve the use of retention services, the program name and strategies should be changed to reflect Black culture. The use of the "Retention Program" is perceived negatively and should be changed to "Academic Support Programs." Peer tutors should undergo extensive training, and universities should establish committees, which should include administrators, faculty, and students to monitor, evaluate and make recommendations to improve the Academic Support Program.

Black students persist due to experiences and interactions that occur in the school environment (Latiker, 2003). Frequent daily interactions with students in and out of the classroom impact the student's decision to stay or leave school (Tinto, 1993; Chenoweth 1999). At risk students who persist cite someone on the faculty who has made positive contact with them outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1997). In a study by Schaeffer et al. (2003), both students and faculty were asked to rank the 10 qualities of effective teachers. In order of importance, the top seven qualities are as follows: 1) approachability; 2) creativity and interesting; 3) flexibility and open mindedness; 4) knowledgeable; 5) realistic expectations; 6) fairness; and, 7) respectful,. The major difference between teacher and student responses were that faculty placed more emphasis on teaching techniques while students placed more emphasis on the student-teacher relationship. Students felt it was important to have someone who is engaged in their learning experience, care about their future, and have a vested interest in their education, irrespective of race (Hudson, Henderson, & Henderson, 2002).

Sherman, Giles, & Williams-Green (1994) argued that faculty should be convinced that retention is important and that the problems associated with student retention are equally important. Efforts must be organized to assist faculty and students in understanding how to receive and take advantage of the available assistance (Sherman et al., 1994). Spradley (2001) argued that faculty must be challenged to be not only facilitators of learning, but also to accommodate the problems and experiences of Black males. According to Padilla (2000), the perception of the extent that a program shares in the institutional mission is an important component in faculty participation in any program to succeed. Faculty who buy into the institutional mission reported greater satisfaction than those who consider the mission irrelevant (Padilla, 2000). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), institutional climate can influence faculty members if the activities have some rewards. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) stated that faculty cannot be expected to be involved in out-of-class student activities if they are recruited for research and their research brings them more prominence than involvement with undergraduate students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Incentives should be offered to faculty and staff to participate in the process and programs developed with faculty input. This creates a level of openness so that views from various areas of institutional life are heard (Tinto, 1993).

Many students' lack of institutional commitment and decision to withdraw from an institution lies in the student's experiences and inability to utilize the university's resources. If and when institutional networks are working successfully determines whether a student leaves or graduates from the institution (Hermanowiz, 2004). Non-cognitive factors such as time management, advising, social support, team building, and

leadership skills greatly impacts academic persistence. Leadership and character development activities showed the best promise as a strategy for improving Black male retention (Peters, 2005). In the interest of retention, colleges and universities must take a proactive stance by contacting at-risk students, offering them specific services, and working closely with the students to develop their confidence skills and interest in learning.

Research Gap

Most of the published research on Black men in community colleges has been quantitative. While this tradition offers some advantages like generalizable research findings, it does not provide those important insights and voices from Black men. This study employees qualitative research to illuminate how Black men experience community college and, more specifically, what meanings they derive from their experiences as members of BMIs.

Finally, retention theorists' work largely supports the practice of narrowly framing student success as an outcome of student effort, therefore overlooking the role that institutions and other contextual variables play. Thus, new frameworks and theories are needed to further unveil the sundry factors that shape student success for Black men in community colleges. Anti-deficit frameworks are perhaps much better suited for studying Black men in this setting as it sheds light on insights from men who achieve success, which can help educators determine what institutional practices and policies work to support these students. This study aims to use research to provide meaningful and useful insights that can be used to inform policy and practice at two-year institutions.

Conclusion

Wood and Harris's (2014) Five Domains conceptual model provides a lens through which Black male student success can be investigated, and it is imperative that educational leaders simultaneously use multiple insights from the framework to bolster successful educational outcomes for these men. Black male students' success in community college is a phenomenon that is not widely empirically studied through an anti-deficit lens. This must change if institutions are to build support for persistence and completion for this population.

Chapter three presents the methodology used in this study. In chapters four and five, methods for data collection and analysis are presented, along with a discussion of the implication of findings and recommendations for institutional action to improve academic success for Black male students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Extant research on the black male collegians is replete with studies that largely characterize them as academically underprepared and even unfit for college. However, there are countless Black male active learners, who have high GPAs, impressive records of leadership and service, enriching educational experiences, and vast networks of institutional agents and supporters (Harper, 2009). Such outcomes and networks have been attributed to Black males' participation in targeted programming that provides various academic and interpersonal supports and opportunities as well as mitigates potential barriers to success. These programs include, but are not limited to, minority-male focused programming at community colleges. An investigation of Black males' experiences at these institutions may prove instructive in identifying experiences, conditions, and factors that facilitate or challenge post-secondary success. Accordingly, the current study aims to further investigate how these men make meaning of their community college experiences. More specifically, how they make meaning of membership in a Black male initiative (BMI) program and to what aspects of these programs and experiences they attribute their success, defined as completing an associate degree program.

Prior inquiry on BMIs have been designed as program evaluations, which often assumes a theory of change and attends to fidelity of implementation (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2016). Further, they have focused solely on academic outcomes, such as persistence, retention, and grade point average data in order to illuminate the effectiveness of such programs. While these studies provide valuable information to institutions, they lack the deep and rich understanding of the student descriptions of

experiences needed to inform practice and policy that support achievement for community college men of color (Wood & Harris, 2014).

This chapter restates the research purpose and guiding research questions as well as describes the research paradigm and research design (e.g., research sites, sample, methods of data collection, management, analysis, and presentation). The chapter also includes a discussion of research trustworthiness, limitation and delimitations, researcher subjectivity, and ethical considerations.

Research Purpose and Research Questions

This study seeks to understand the experiences of Black male members of a community college BMI program in regard to social, personal, and academic support and achievement. Therefore, this study answers the following research question and sub questions:

1) How do Black male achievers describe and make meaning of their community college experiences?
2) How do Black male achievers describe their experiences as members of a BMI?
3) What factors within the BMI influenced their success?
4) What factors beyond the BMI influenced their success?

The significance of responding to these questions allow for practical implications, such as informing BMI design and activities that provide students with the needed support to be successful. It also provides deeper insight into the experiences of a population that navigated successfully through their community college experiences despite inequities.

Paradigm of Inquiry

The constructivist paradigm provides the opportunity to interpret the meanings others have about the world (Creswell, 2009). Corbin and Strauss (2008) described the constructivist viewpoint as "concepts and theories constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences or lives, both to the researcher and themselves" (p. 10). To this end, I solicited detailed responses in order to investigate their definitions of success and their experiences as community college students in a BMI program utilizing open-ended interview questions. The goal of constructivism is to rely as much as possible on participant viewpoints on the subject matter being studied (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the more open ended the question, the better it allows the researcher to carefully listen to what people say and do in their life settings (Creswell, 2009). In this study, I sought to construct meaning of these men's experiences specific to their lives as successful community college graduates.

Crotty (1998) wrote, "no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object" (p. 45). Constructivism uniquely factors in the context and setting of the participant, which ultimately matches the goal of this study. Constructivists believe the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interactions with a human community (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, in order to better understand the experiences of these men, I considered the personal context of their situations. Creswell (2013) states that the traditional view that only quantitative methods can be used to credibly draw causal conclusions has long been disputed by some qualitative researchers.

Creswell further purports that field research is far better than solely quantified approaches at developing explanations of what we call local causality – the actual events and processes that lead to specific outcomes (p. 132). The aim of this study is to see how community college is experienced by members of BMIs, for insight into their definitions of success and what aspects of their community college experiences they feel influenced their success.

In summary, a paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that guide actions or influence the research (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the constructivist researcher is looking for the complexity of multiple realities, rather than narrowing the meaning into categories or a few ideas as often seen in quantitative research. Based on the literature reviewed, future research is needed to continue to understand the complex relationship between membership in BMI programs, student success, and perceptions of the community college experience.

Research Design and Methodology

To investigate the experiences of participants of Black male initiative programs, a qualitative approach was taken in the design of the research study. Qualitative research has become a recognized method for research and studies in a variety of social science fields including education (Merriam, 2002). It is organized around the belief that reality is ever changing and socially constructed. There is not one specific agreed upon meaning; individuals construct their own meanings based on their own lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). There are also several intellectual goals for which qualitative studies are especially suited. In a qualitative study, the researcher is not only interested in the physical events and behaviors that are taking place but also in how the participants

make sense of these and how their understanding influences their behavior (Maxwell, 2013). Given the exploratory nature of this study and the research questions that emerged from the literature and direction of interest, a qualitative approach was the obvious choice for the research design.

Although there are several options for qualitative research design and methodology (e.g., grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative analysis, ethnography, and case study), a basic interpretive design was determined as the most appropriate methodology for the study. This methodology incorporates key criteria of a qualitative inquiry, including being an interpretive design, situating the researcher as the instrument, and seeking rich descriptive context to help in understanding participant experiences (Merriam, 2002). Accordingly, basic interpretive design methodology was best suited for an exploratory study aimed at discovering the experiences and understanding the meaning of these experiences of the study participants. In this study, the researcher sought to understand how these men described and made meaning of their community college experiences, specifically as they related to membership in a BMI program, and the aspects of the program they reported to be instrumental to their success.

The design was based upon the assumption that the purpose and function of BMI programs within collegiate settings is unique and beneficial, thus worthy of investigation. Creswell (2013) notes that a qualitative design is appropriate for researchers seeking further understanding of an individuals' or groups' experience. Accordingly, through interviews, the researcher was able to probe and ask participants in-depth questions as to the meaning of their responses. Additionally, he was able to interact and follow up with the participants, providing the opportunity to "check with respondents for accuracy of

implementation [and] to explore unusual or unanticipated responses" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Furthermore, a basic interpretive qualitative study provided the flexibility necessary to feel confident that the experiences that led to the success of Black male community college men who were members of a BMI program have been fully captured and explored. However, qualitative research is not exempt from limitations. Critics of qualitative research design have expressed concerns as the primary method for gathering information involves the researcher and his or her presence might bias the study (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, qualitative research has been scrutinized on the basis of validity, reliability, and generalizability, all of these being fully addressed later in this chapter (under "trustworthiness").

Site of Research

The research sample was drawn from recent community college graduates who were members of a BMI program while they attended community college. The BMI programs where participants held membership are located at two, large, multi-campus community colleges. Success Community College is in the mid-Atlantic and Graduation Community College is in the northeastern United States, both providing workforce development and granting certificates and associate degrees. Success Community College is the second-largest community college in the United States, comprised of more than 75,000 students and 2,600 faculty and staff members. It is also one of the most internationally diverse colleges in the United States, with a student body consisting of individuals from more than 180 countries. Success Community College is a public, open admissions, multi-campus, regionally accredited institution and offers more than 160 degrees at the associate's level and certificate programs. Graduation Community College

is also regionally accredited. It offers more than 70 associate degrees, academic and proficiency certificate programs, consisting of a main campus and three regional centers serving 27,000 students. Seventy-six percent are minority. While the institutions the participants attended differ in size and institutional characteristics, the BMI programs housed at each of these institutions share very apparent similarities in mission and design. These sites were selected due to my familiarity with their BMI programs, common program elements, documented success, and the length of time the programs have been in operation. Each of the programs help men of color overcome barriers to graduation while providing leadership development, mentoring, access to resources, academic skill building, and activities and events that foster confidence, resiliency, community engagement, and personal development. Furthermore, each program maintains a similar calendar of events, workshops, community engagement opportunities, and cultural experiences. They all connect men of color to positive role models on campus and aid with navigating processes, such as student financial assistance and employment opportunities.

Research Sample

Decisions about where to conduct research and whom to include in it are an essential part of research methods (Maxwell, 2013). For this study, the researcher used purposeful selection as a way of identifying and securing the 11 participants in this study. In this strategy, settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that cannot be determined as well from other choices (Maxwell 2013, p. 97). The size of the sample and specific cases depends on the study's purpose. According to Patton (2002), within

qualitative inquiry, rules for sample size do not exist. The decision of sample size depends on several of the following factors: a) what the researcher wants to know; b) the purpose of the study; c) what is at stake; d) what will be useful; e) what will have credibility; and, f) what can be done with available time and resources (Patton, 2002). In keeping with the definition of success for this study, the participant criteria are Black men who were members of a BMI program and graduated from a community college associate degree program within one calendar year of the interview (See Appendices A, B, and C for initial screening communications). The researcher determined it was best not to use current students to participate in the study. The assumption was that the students who have graduated would have had time to thoughtfully reflect upon their college experiences. Based upon these criteria, BMI staff were instrumental with identifying and contacting students that were appropriate for this study. All participants were required to complete a brief close-ended questionnaire to further confirm their eligibility for the study (Appendix D).

Study participants were Black, male, associate degree completers and former members of a community college BMI program. Because the value of participant information lies in their ability to reflect thoughtfully on their experiences at the college and as members of a BMI program, participants must have been members for at least two consecutive semesters prior to graduating (See Appendices E and F for communications prior to interviews). The rationale for this requirement is that most BMI program activities, resources, and student support services are designed around an institution's academic year. Additionally, while participation in a certain percentage of BMI program activities and events was not required to be eligible for the study, the researcher selected

participants who had significant involvement in the program, as reported by BMI staff. The rationale is that these men would have numerous and substantial experiences and therefore be able to thoughtfully respond to specific questions during the interviews.

In total, 11 Black males agreed to participate in this study. All attended community college at one of two large, multi-campus, community colleges. Their participation in the BMI on their campus ranged from two semesters to six semesters. They ranged in age from twenty-one to twenty-five years old, with the exception of one student who was 29 years old. All of them graduated from community college, and all but two of them had transferred to a four-year college or university. All received transfer degrees. Lastly, the participants were given pseudonyms by the researcher to preserve anonymity – for a graphical summary of participants see the demographic information below (Table 1).

Table 1. *Participant Information*

Participant	Age	Community College	Major	No. of Semesters in BMI	Transferred to 4 yr. Institution
Kenneth	21	Success	Science	2	yes
Adam	22	Success	Business Administration	4	yes
Benson	24	Success	Business Administration	2	yes
Arlen	21	Success	Business Administration	2	yes
Kaman	23	Success	Business Administration	4	yes
Dawson	21	Success	General Studies	3	yes
Craig	23	Success	Music	6	yes
Todd	19	Success	General Studies	2	yes
Ken	21	Graduation	Liberal Arts	4	yes
Isaac	29	Graduation	Business Management	5	no
Terrell	21	Graduation	Social Science	4	yes

Data Collection

The goal of this study was to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of Black male members of community college BMI programs and what aspects of the program and those experiences contributed to their academic success. Thus, conducting semi-structured, individual interviews permitted the researcher to gain a rich, in-depth understanding of their experiences, the phenomenon under investigation. Merriam (2009) states, "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe the behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). Furthermore, Merriam (2009) notes that when "we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 88) interviews can be used to capture information about these events. As is the case in this study, I am interested in the events and experiences that these men had while attending community college. The observation of the phenomenon under investigation is impossible to achieve, thus interviewing these men is the best way to gather descriptions of their experiences. The researcher preferred to conduct face-to-face interviews, as it allowed the researcher to focus on non-verbal cues that may require further probing and follow up questions (Seidman, 1998). The researcher informed the participants that they could expect the interviews to take between 60 and 90 minutes but could be longer or shorter. The researcher conducted most interviews in a private office or private conference room. All participants were informed of their rights at the very beginning of the interviews. The participants were asked if the interviews could be recorded; all agreed to have the interview recorded. The interviews were recorded using a mobile, digital recording device. A total of 11 face-to-face interviews were conducted for this study.

The interview protocol for the current study is included in Appendix G. As recommended by Dillman (2008), the initial questions of the interview protocol were designed to establish rapport and a level of comfort with the participant without being overly intrusive. These initial questions were followed by a set of core questions regarding the participant's experiences attending community college and participating in a BMI program. Finally, they were provided with the opportunity to share any additional information that they felt was not captured by the interview questions. The questions in the interview protocol were strategically structured to encourage participants to reflect upon their past experiences, to elicit thick rich descriptions of those experiences, and encourage sense making.

Data Management

The researcher used Merriam's (2009) suggested methods of data management. Digital files of audio recordings, transcripts, memos, and field notes of each interview were created and coded with a file name that anonymously matches it to the interview. These files were stored and maintained on a password-protected computer. To maintain a backup file, one digital copy of these files was saved on a password-protected USB drive. A digital copy of the interview files was also uploaded to the Atlas TI data management and analysis software program on the researcher's computer.

Writing analytic memos particularly helped the researcher track his thinking and sense-making throughout the study and captured important steps in the research process. Additionally, memo writing assisted the researcher in the coding process to recall ideas for coding and track emerging themes (Maxwell, 2012). As the researcher coded the

interviews and memos, a codebook was developed to ensure consistency of codes. The researcher analyzed the data using Atlas TI.

Data Analysis

The outcome of data analysis is for the researcher to make sense of the data by consolidating, reducing, and interpreting the data (Merriam, 2009). During data collection, the researcher began analyzing the data to search for emerging themes. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed into a word processing document for analysis; the transcriptions were completed by a third-party transcription service.

According to Saldaña (2012), a code is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based…data" (p. 3). Coding was therefore an appropriate means to begin data analysis in the study. Deductive codes were developed through the lens of the analysis of the Wood and Harris's (2014) conceptual framework. Inductive codes were derived from the words used by the participants. The data were coded applying Creswell's (2013) method of open coding in which broad classifications of codes are created. Based on the open coding of the data, the researcher employed axial coding by selecting open codes to serve as the main phenomena and recoding the data into categories relative to these phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

As noted by Saldaña (2013), "coding is only the initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation" (p. 8). The next step in the data analysis process is to develop themes based on codes that answer the research questions (Saldaña, 2013). To develop themes, the researcher used both within-case and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013). Through within-case analysis, the researcher was able to

interpret each participant's responses to the interview questions; allowing him to understand each participant's experiences apart from the sample. Employing within-case analysis first, provided the researcher with a deep understanding of each participant's experience with the phenomena of study prior to conducting cross-case analysis. Through cross-case analysis, he compared responses to the interview questions across participants in the sample. This type of analysis provided an understanding of how the phenomena were represented throughout the sample. Cross-case analysis contributed to the development of themes that cut across the data from the sample and answered the research questions.

Analytic memos were another important source of data analysis for this study. Through memos, I documented my perceptions and feelings about the data collected in each interview. After each interview, I reflected on what was shared during the interview as well as some of the affective elements of the interview, such as attitude and demeanor. Memo writing also helped me begin to make sense of the content of each interview (Saldaña, 2013). Upon the completion of the interviews, these memos served as valuable tools, as they provided context for the interviews and charted the progression of my thinking and reflection during the data collection process.

Data Presentation

As themes emerged during the data analysis phase of the study, the researcher synthesized the data to present thick rich descriptions that arose from the data and provided detailed explanations for how the participants understand and make sense of their community college experience as members of a minority male initiative. The

researcher used participant quotes and the themes developed during analysis to describe and share the men's experiences and answer the research questions.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a means of validating qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). As noted by Merriam (2009), there are many means by which to increase the validity of qualitative research findings. The researcher used multiple strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. First, the researcher interviewed participants until data saturation was achieved. Second, member checking was used to confirm the researcher had captured the essence of the participant's community college experience as members of a BMI. Third, the researcher sought participant validation of the data analysis. As noted by Johnson (1997), interpretive validity is increased "by sharing your interpretations of participants' viewpoints with the participants and other members of the group [to] clear up areas of miscommunication" (p. 285). Finally, site triangulation was achieved through using participants from two multi-campus community colleges, and subsequently two different BMI programs, thereby reducing the effect on the study of local factors peculiar to one institution. Findings may have greater credibility in the eyes of readers where similar results emerge at different sites. The researcher increased the validity of the proposed study by employing these trustworthiness techniques. Increasing the validity of qualitative research findings increases what Merriam (2009) identifies as the transferability, reliability, confirmability, and credibility of these findings.

Limitations

Albeit multiple trustworthiness techniques were employed to increase the validity of the findings of the current study, this research is not without limitations nor do the

limitations outlined below invalidate the potential findings. These limitations are not uncommon in qualitative research and were mitigated by employing the trustworthiness techniques mentioned in the previous section.

Delimitations

The delimitation of this qualitative study is the selection of two large multi-campus community colleges, in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, and the sole population of Black males who successfully graduated from those community colleges. These institutions were chosen precisely because of their established BMI programs and because they had a large population of Black men that were still connected to the institution.

Participant recruitment is a limitation of this study. Since the participants are graduates, they are no longer attending the community college or participating in the BMI program. Subsequently, contacting these men to invite them to participate was challenging due to changes in residence and contact information. I relied heavily on BMI program staff in order to mitigate this limitation. Often, due to the strong relationships that were developed during their time in the program, these young men remained in contact and provided updated information to mentors and other program staff members even after graduating. These connections allowed me to gather accurate information for facilitating participant invitations.

Researcher bias and reactivity are additional limitations in this study (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher's personal and professional knowledge of community college students and minority male initiative programs creates a natural link between he and the participants. This relationship has the potential to influence the interpretation of the data.

Furthermore, he may have been less inclined to probe participants regarding some of their responses about topics with which he was familiar. The limitation of researcher bias and reactivity was mitigated by collecting what Maxwell (2013) calls rich data. By retrieving in-depth responses from participants and probing for more information, even when the researcher is familiar with the topic, the impact of the researcher's subjectivity on the research findings can be diminished.

Another limitation of the study is that other phenomena which were not explored in the current study may have an impact on the results. For example, students who have parents that attended college or participated in a college preparatory program while they were in high school may share characteristics that predisposed them to experiences and situations that fostered student achievement. The impossibility of understanding or accounting for every construct that might influence the phenomenon under investigation makes this a limitation of the current study.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study provide valuable information about the experiences of Black male achievers who attended community college and were members of a BMI. While the results are not generalizable to all black males attending community college, the results are transferable to some of these students at some institutions.

Researcher Subjectivity

Qualitative methodology recognizes that the subjectivity of the researcher is intimately involved in scientific research. Maxwell (2013) cites attention to a researcher's possible biases as an essential component of qualitative research. Subjectivity is inevitable in qualitative research and guides everything from the topic one chooses to

study to formulating research questions and interpreting data. As a qualitative researcher I reflect on my past experiences, the values and attitudes that I bring to research, and how these affect my research.

My professional experiences as a K-12 educator, community college administrator, and former minority male initiative coordinator provided motivation for engaging in this research. Additionally, I bring to this research my experiences of navigating higher education as a black male. After graduating from high school, I attended a large, predominately white, research university in the southeastern region of the United States. While attending, I was a part of a minority support program for black students studying the physical and mathematical sciences. This program provided me with the confidence, resources, cultural appreciation, social capital, and academic support necessary for me to persist and graduate from this university. I have a fond recollection of my experiences as a student and member of this support program and all that it provided. After completing graduate school and beginning my career in the public schools, I found myself engaged in the development and coordination of mentoring and leadership development programs for Black male students. I have been intimately involved in developing and sustaining BMI programs for the past 17 years.

My interest in learning about BMI programs and their perceived benefits dates to the moment I began developing and coordinating these programs. Moreover, I have an avid interest in learning from the men that participate in these programs and learning how they make sense and meaning of their experiences. The knowledge gleaned from research on this topic informs practice, program design, and delivery in very beneficial ways.

As a qualitative researcher, I am the instrument through which data is collected and analyzed. Therefore, it was paramount that I was aware of my proximity to this topic and transparent about how my subjectivity may appear in the research process. Being equipped with this knowledge allowed me to attend to this subjectivity and position myself within this project.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher took precaution to protect the well-being of the participants while they participated in this study. Participation in this study was voluntary and the risks were minimal. Prior to beginning the study, participants were informed of their right to decline answering any questions that they were uncomfortable answering and to cease participation in the interview or the study at any time. The researcher was required to have Institutional Review Board approval before proceeding with this study. Furthermore, he ensured that the board's standards were upheld when working with the participants and the data they provided. Prior to each interview, the researcher provided the participant with necessary information regarding the research study to inform the participant's consent to participate in the research.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the qualitative research methodology used to answer the research questions addressing the experiences of Black male community college graduates and their membership in a BMI. Chapter four discusses the research results based on the interpretation and the analysis of the data. It was the researcher's intention to conduct a thorough analysis of the data collected to determine how Black male

achievers describe and make meaning of their community college experiences, to fill gaps in research, and to explore implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents key findings that emerged from a thorough analysis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analytic memos written throughout the data collection process. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how Black male achievers experienced their overall community college experience and specifically how they made sense of their membership in a Black Male Initiative Program. The study's central question, "how do Black male achievers describe and make meaning of their community college experience?" was addressed by examining the following sub-questions:

1) How do Black male achievers describe their experiences as members of a Black male initiative?
2) What factors within the Black male initiative influenced their success?
3) What factors beyond the Black male initiative influenced their success?

These questions guided this research project and provide key insights into institutional, programmatic, social, and academic factors related to the students' community college experiences as members of a BMI program.

The student experiences investigated in this study highlight the possibilities and potential for creating and strengthening the resources and support made available to Black males attending community colleges. In this chapter, eight important themes are illustrated and described as contributing to the overall success of these community college graduates. The major themes that emerged were a positive community college experience, significant faculty/staff relationships, peer interactions and campus engagement, holistic support, powerful mentoring relationships, personal growth and change, and perceptions of program value, structure, and design.

The results of this study were derived from interview questions designed to gather descriptions of college experiences and perceptions of the BMI and its impact. Significant statements were extracted from interview data and then were analyzed and arranged, resulting in eight themes (see Table 2). In the section below, themes are presented along with supportive quotations from participants that answer the research questions.

Table 2. *Themes with Descriptions*

Number	Themes	Descriptions
1	Positive Community College Experience	Appreciation for community college experience, diversity, sense of purpose, sense of belonging, social capital.
2	Significant Administrator/ Faculty/Staff Relationships	Opportunities to interact and develop relationships with teaching faculty, student support staff, and college administrators.
3	Peer Interactions and Campus Engagement	Connections, peer support, social integration on campus, membership in student organizations.
4	Holistic Support Provided Through BMI	Mentoring, accountability, academic support, networking, social support, community engagement, promoting a positive image of men of color.
5	Powerful Mentoring Relationships	Role model (e.g. father figure), available, high expectations, open-door policy.
6	Personal Growth and Change	Personal growth and change as a result of BMI participation, enlightenment, lessons learned.
7	BMI Exceeded Expectations: Appraisal, Value, and Meaning	Meaning of participation, overall value of participation, lasting connections.
8	Perceptions of BMI Program Structure	Type of activities, size of program, membership criteria.

Theme 1: Positive Community College Experience

Theme 1 emerged as participants began to describe their reasons for attending community college and their overall experiences attending community college. While several participants reported that their decision to attend community college was marked with doubt, hesitancy, and uncertainty, they collectively reported having positive experiences as a community college student and were pleased with their decision to attend. They reported that their experiences in the community college environment

fostered a sense of purpose and belonging while increasing their social capital. Additionally, several participants cited their appreciation for the diversity that existed at their community college, its positive impact on their experiences, and how the exposure to such diversity has impacted their lives since leaving the community college. Finally, participants described the patient and supportive environment of their community college and how they benefitted from the strong interpersonal relationships with students, staff, and teaching faculty. Below are supportive quotations from the participants.

Isaac, of Graduation Community College, metaphorically describes the benefit and a sense of safety in starting his higher education experience at a community college. He mentions how common it is to be encouraged to pursue higher education, yet how uncommon it is for that encouragement to be followed by counsel on how to navigate, what is for most, unfamiliar territory:

> Community college is a like a gateway drug, allowing you to get acclimated to the college setting. Allows you to get acclimated to becoming a college student. And for me, that's important because a lot of times people say that we should go to college, but they'll never tell you how to navigate through college.

Similarly, Adam, a graduate of Success Community College, describes his experience in a community college environment as a smart starting point, which was conducive to learning, making mistakes, and growth as an adult:

> I think it was a good stepping stone, just because I wasn't too sure about what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go. Coming here, I felt like if I messed up, I wouldn't regret it too much. I guess my experience there [the community college] was eventful in the sense that I met a lot of people, but also taught me that people are temporary. Just seeing how far you can go in such little time, it's kind of ... I don't know the word for this ... amazing.

Craig, of Success Community College, also speaks of the "stepping stone" nature of his community college experience and how attending a community college helped him

establish a supportive social network and prepared him academically and emotionally before attending the 4-yr. college:

> Yeah. It definitely helped me grow as an individual, and I definitely have become prepared for attending university. I'm like way ahead of the game in certain aspects. A lot of the things that people find hard, I don't find hard just because I've done it already for like two or three years, however long I was at community college. It's definitely helped me create a network and I gained a lot of friends and mentors out of it, and it's been good because it created the support system that I need while I'm gone [away from home at a four-year college/university] that I wouldn't have had if I didn't go to community college.

Several powerful quotes were lifted from interviews that underscore how pleased participants were with their decision to attend community college and the benefits they reaped from attending. When asked about his decision to attend community college, Kaman, of Success Community College, shared how satisfied he was with his decision and how he would advise others, even his own children, to attend community college because of his positive experience. Kaman remarked, “in retrospect, it was a great decision. Even my own kids, I would advise them to go. I won't force them to go but I'll tell them definitely go to community college first.”

It was quite common for participants to mention the patience and scaffolding provided to them while attending community college. Ken fondly referenced the patience afforded to him while trying to chart his academic course and life path as a young community college student:

> I was always able to um plan, my ideas, set my ideas out on the table and sort of kind of figure out what I wanted to do. I never felt rushed. Patience is always key at community college. Um, and I feel like whatever you want to do in life, having that patience, it's, it's essential because, you know, being a young adult, being a young college student, you have so much going on, you're trying to figure yourself out as well as figuring out what you want to do career wise, so when you have an institution that's willing to be patient with you that’s great. Um, I feel like learning that kind of patience will also help you be successful in life.

While no interview question specifically asked participants about diversity at the community college they attended, several recalled their campuses being very diverse in many aspects and expressed their appreciation for attending such diverse schools. Some even note that the level of diversity they experienced and appreciated at the community college level did not exist at the same level when they transferred to a four-year institution. As one participant reflected upon his experiences, he described his appreciation for the diversity that he experienced during his time as a community college student and how he came to appreciate it once he started attending a four-year university. Kenneth, of Success Community College, explained,

> It's not as diverse. In a way, it's also kind of saddening because the diversity really isn't there. There's separation between Blacks, Latinos, and whites, so it's hard to try to go to another culture or another ethnicity and try to confidently or comfortably associate with them, because there's a lot of questioning at first until they get to know you. So, that's the hard part, and that didn't happen at Success Community College because we were so used to being so openly diverse, which made it easier to build friendships and feel welcomed.

Based upon interview data, attending a community college was the right decision for all the participants in this study. Aside from offering students a low-cost education near home, community college gave them more personalized attention, a diverse environment, unique opportunities for growth and development, and stepping stones toward a four-year institution.

Theme 2: Significant Administrator/Faculty/Staff Relationships

Theme 2 emerged from the responses to interview research questions aimed at understanding how these men experienced and made meaning of their relationships with administrators, faculty, and staff while attending community college. The participants shared how they were able to build relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators

due to the familial nature of the community college environment and the opportunities for interaction afforded to them through participation in the BMI. All the participants responded positively about their interactions and experiences with college faculty and staff. Their experiences were marked by feelings that college faculty and staff cared about them on a personal level, were concerned about their success, and valued the opportunity to develop relationships with their students.

Several participants described the significant and beneficial relationships that they developed with administrators at the community college they attended. These responses were solicited through interview questions designed to get them to reflect on the relationships that they developed with college administrators, such as presidents, provosts, deans, and coordinators. For many of the participants, these relationships were formed and sustained as a result of campus employment or through their participation in the BMI. The relationships were described as genuine, as the administrators demonstrated sincere interest in them, both personally and academically. Likewise, they described how much they appreciated the openness of communication that characterized these relationships, how sometimes the administrators went out of their way to hold conversations with them. The participants seemed to understand the critical roles of administrators and the hectic nature of their schedules, which purportedly deepened their appreciation for such relationships. The following quotations from participants underscore the significance and provide examples of the relationships that these men had with college administrators. Dawson, of Success Community College, recalls how he appreciated the interpersonal relationships he developed with college administrators while attending community college. He stated,

> I think, the community college just fostered a healthy relationship between the administrators and students and they were always trying to interact with us as well. When I joined SGA [Student Government Association], we would have dinners with the administrative staff and they would be asking questions about students' experiences and tried to understand what we were going through as students.

Similarly, Kenneth recalled having confidence that he could talk with administrators if something came up that he needed to share or when he needed their assistance. Kenneth recounted,

> I did feel a sense that they were open to hearing what I had to say. I just felt very confident. If I did want to talk to them about something, I knew I could talk to them about it. I had to work office hours for the provost. I mean, I would spend hours in the office. He'd be just a room away from me, so he would just talk to me and I'll talk to him. So that's how I got to know him better.

Likewise, Adam speaks of how his relationship started with the Dean of Students. He and the Dean had casual conversation at the BMI retreat, which appears to have led to his being comfortable seeking him out when he needed things on campus or just to chat. Being able to connect in this casual setting allowed him to feel comfortable approaching the Dean in a more formal setting or on campus. Adam further commented about his relationship with the Dean of Students, stating that "It's just a good feeling to know if I have a problem with anything, I could go to him."

Much like Adam, Arlen, of Success Community College, describes his relationship with the Dean of Students and notes the stark contrast from his experience with administrators in high school. I thought it was pretty cool, being able to get so close to Dean Wortham, because when I was in high school, I didn't even know my principal."

Kaman was quite excited and eager to describe the comfortable nature of his interactions and relationship with an administrator at Success Community College: "My relationship with Dean Wortham was honestly the biggest and the coolest thing ever.

Prior to joining the BMI, I didn't even know who he was. I had never seen him before. You may hear about him here and there, but you just never saw the guy. Then you get to meet him and it's a totally different experience because he is just a regular guy."

When Dawson was asked about his relationship with administrators, he described his appreciation for the steps that they took to make themselves available and build relationships with students. He reported, "sometimes deans just walk around and talk to students and stuff like that. It's those little things that make administrators seem approachable."

While most of the participants made mention of their significant relationship with the Dean of Students and other administrators, one of them recalled knowing, but having a much more limited relationship with the president of his community college. Arlen recounted,

> The President of Success Community College, well I've met him a couple times, but I don't think he knows who I am. I would just be able to recognize him like that or we'd be able to just greet each other like that, but nothing much more beyond that.

Another facet of the significant relationship development explored during the interviews was the relationships that participants developed with teaching faculty. There was no mention of any negative or strained relationships with faculty members. Instead, they reported being able to comfortably develop these relationships at their community college and how their participation in the BMI, in many cases, served as the catalyst for the development of these relationships. Several participants shared how important they felt it was to have a relationship with faculty members and how these relationships had a positive impact on their learning experience and academic success.

The responses from participants about their relationships with teaching faculty naturally fell into two categories. Some participants referenced their relationships with teaching faculty with no reference to the BMI and some mentioned how the BMI served as a catalyst or vehicle for the development of significant relationships with teaching faculty. Quotations from participant interviews underscore the significance and benefits of the relationships with teaching faculty and suggest how their membership in the BMI may have fostered the development of these relationships.

One participant, Adam mentioned that he felt as if his membership in the BMI caused faculty to look at him in different way and as a result, begin to offer him more support and nurturing than before. His candid reflection about this shift provides deep insight to the perceived support fostered by teaching faculty when they know students are a part of such a support initiative. He shared,

> My first semester, since I wasn't in the BMI, it was a very quiet zone for me. The teachers weren't so helpful, but then once they found out ... once I joined the BMI, they would help more than what I would expect. Basically, they were pushing me to put my best foot forward and to excel in their class. Joining the BMI was a game changer, all of a sudden, they like saw me in a different light.

Dawson shared how he developed an understanding of the importance of developing relationships with faculty members through some of the responsibilities and requirements he had as a member of the BMI. He describes his moment of enlightenment and what he wished other students knew. He recalled,

> Professors like Professor Davis or Professor Santoro, they were teachers that knew me beyond just being a name on the list. They actually knew me because I went to class, and we had relationships, and they helped me out and what not. When I first came to Success in fall 2015, I had a mindset of singularity. I'm just going to do this by myself. I have an issue, I'm going to deal with it. That's what really hurt me in the Math class that I took but being in so many classes and interacting with teachers and having relationships allowed me to see that they are people too. I was okay with going to talk to them if I needed them to fill out a progress report or if I needed to ask them about an assignment or to ask what's

> wrong with this or I didn't understand this, or even shoot them an email. I find it really funny just how many students had issues with teachers and they just wouldn't reach out. I'm like hey, did you shoot them an email? They would say no, why would I do that?

Dawson's words describe the transformation in his attitude about the importance of relationships with teaching faculty. He speaks of how he started his college experience feeling like he could do it alone and as he gained more experience and encountered pitfalls, particularly in math, he realized that a relationship with teaching faculty is essential and allowed for open dialogue with them about his classroom and learning experiences. He quickly realized how comfortable it could be communicating with teaching faculty and thereby encouraged fellow students to experience the same ease in communication with their professors.

Dawson offered the following reflection about his experience breaking the ice and finally getting to know faculty members:

> I know it's scary at first, but once you make that first step and you get to know them, they get to know you, it's smooth sailing. You just go with it, and it's like a whole new door that opens up for you.

Kaman, referred to how his attendance at a faculty-staff social event sponsored by the BMI, changed his perspective about student-faculty interaction and opened the door to some long lasting, beneficial, genuine relationships:

> During the BMI faculty staff mixer event, you got to meet those people then you find out some of those individuals that attended were some of your professors. You say to yourself, well they're in the mixer and this is my professor right. I gained more of an understanding that they're regular people. You are able to talk to them and learn that they actually care about your success. That helped a lot. Getting to know them as people as well, just coming just to chat with them. It was great!

Another participant by the name of Craig responded with a brief compelling statement when asked to describe his relationships with teaching faculty. He simply stated, “hmmm teaching faculty, those are some of the best relationships that I've ever had in my life.”

This theme is characterized by the experiences of participants that described the preconceived notions that they had about administrators, the value of those relationships, insight into how they developed, and the positive impact of those relationships on their academic success.

Theme 3: Peer Interactions and Campus Engagement

This theme emerged from the data collected from interview questions designed to get participants to reflect upon their interactions with peers and their involvement on campus while attending community college. Their responses ranged from describing how they initially became involved on campus and developed relationships with other students to reflecting upon the importance of that involvement and the relationships that subsequently developed. These experiences were so valuable for some participants that they began sharing with other students the importance of getting involved on campus, as they felt that it opened the door to becoming more aware of campus resources and having a more fulfilling experience than students that had little or no involvement. Four participants mentioned their lack of or limited involvement in student life prior to joining the BMI and how they felt that the BMI naturally fostered significant peer interactions and involvement in campus life and other student activities. Upon analyzing the interview data, it became evident that most participants did not have extensive involvement on campus outside of the BMI. They reported feeling as if they got most of what they needed through the BMI’s support services, programming, and activities. On-campus

employment provides an opportunity to build professional skills, meet other students, and find a home on campus. Several participants mentioned how their campus employment opened doors for them to meet new people and have memorable experiences. Overall, while some participants described feeling reticent about becoming involved on campus, they all expressed an overwhelming satisfaction with their decision to get involved and showed tremendous enthusiasm for overcoming their initial reticence.

Kenneth describes how nervous he was about getting involved, how he gradually came to appreciate his involvement, and sought additional opportunities to get involved. Kenneth shared, “at first, it was a little nerve-wracking, but after a while it grew on me and I really did enjoy it. It made me want to continue to pursue these kinds of campus involvements and whatnot.” Once he finally got involved and experienced satisfaction and fulfillment, he began to seek similar experiences on campus.

Similar to Kenneth’s experience, Todd, of Success Community College, spoke of how participating in a campus athletic activity served as the gateway to him meeting people and getting involved on campus and in other organizations, including the BMI. He stated,

> Flag football, that kind of opened up all the doorways for me to get to know new people cause if it wasn't for that, I probably would've still had my little circle of friends that I had but I'm glad that we did have flag football here cause I wouldn't have met the people that I did meet.

As he reflected upon his involvement on campus, Kenneth goes on to mention how he felt as if his involvement helped him stay out of trouble. He said that his involvement required him to stay on campus in a safe environment for longer periods of time and reduced the idol time spent in his home community. Kenneth reflected, “I mean this world's crazy. You never know what could happen so being on campus longer, could

possibly have saved me from anything that could've happened while being outside of campus in the community." At another point in the interview, Kenneth underscored his feelings of safety and the personal growth he experienced as a result of getting involved on campus. "I mean everything after hours was constructive or something positive going on. It helped me get to that man that I want to be, so staying on campus actually helped me, opened my mind up to certain things."

One participant's quote speaks to the action that he recommends students take to get involved at community college. He warns that it cannot be a passive experience. Students must assertively take advantage of the programs, events, and organizations offered on campus. Dawson admonished, "Community college isn't gonna work unless you work it. If you just show up and you expect things to happen, people to come out and help you, no, you got to put yourself out there. I'd say, get involved."

Like the many positive responses from participants about the importance of campus engagement, this participant specifically not only connects his experiences with student life on campus to his being able to build a larger network of friends, but he claims that it also helped him to become a better leader. In response to a question about his involvement in campus activities and organizations, Craig explained,

> During student life, I've met many great people, gained many good friends from there, some I still talk with to this day and closer than ever. I met students whenever I did stuff. It provided me with opportunities to do things that I normally wouldn't do like [to] go baseball games and hockey games, and travel places and go to retreats and meet people from other campuses, but I just wouldn't have met them if I wasn't a part of student life and took those opportunities that were provided to me to go become a better leader.

A few of the participants recalled getting involved on campus as a result of their membership in the BMI on campus. They collectively described the BMI as vehicle for meeting other students. Furthermore, an interesting intersection appeared in the data in

that some participants claimed the BMI opened doors to campus employment and to them interacting with other students on campus. This is particularly apparent in Kenneth's recollection of his involvement on campus:

> If I didn't join the BMI, it would be different. I probably still wouldn't have been getting involved in any campus activities. I probably would still be that person to go to class, and home, and not do anything because I needed the BMI. It helped me take that step into that exposure, without it I probably still would be waiting for that step of exposure. It was a game changer for sure. Another big factor was with those last two years was working for the community college and being involved with the BMI, it kind of got me more involved on campus, helped me to meet friends, and helped me get to experience that community involvement.

While the participants were deeply involved in the BMI and some even in other campus organizations, none of them reported having an extensive involvement or affiliations outside of the BMI. Much of their peer interactions and campus involvement was facilitated by their membership in the BMI. There was a general sentiment that the BMI encouraged and facilitated their involvement on campus but that the BMI warned against becoming over involved, potentially resulting in an inability to maintain a healthy balance between student life and academic pursuit. Like several other participants, Benson's response underscored his fulfillment within the BMI and noted his limited involvement in student life organizations and events outside of the BMI. Benson, of Success Community College, recounted,

> It wasn't intentional. I had all the best intentions in the world. I think I went to a couple of Business Club meetings, but I just ... when I got wrapped into the BMI I was like, this is all I need. Outside of that, it was just a couple small events that I probably attended even or clubs that I was in, I just showed up to them, I wasn't that big on participating in much outside of the BMI.

Kenneth shared that there were many organizations on campus of which he was aware, but his interest in those organizations was not peaked like his interest in the BMI. He references the unique and fulfilling nature of his involvement in the BMI and how

even at his campus job as a student ambassador was so fulfilling because several of the ambassadors were also BMI members. Kenneth fondly recalled,

> The BMI itself was just something that stood out uniquely to me like ... I mean they had programs like the Honors Program, Phi Theta Kappa, and all that which were great. I heard about them. They're great, but they were never something that really peaked my interest at all. The BMI itself really was very unique with what it offered and what I got from it. There's nothing that I think that can really compare to it. I mean, the only thing close to it would probably my time as a student ambassador, but the only reason why it's the closest was because my co-workers were BMI members.

As reflected in the interview data, participants noted the value of being engaged in student life and organizations. They recognized the short-term and long-term benefits of their involvement and connected it to their overall success. It was apparent that BMI members who worked on campus reaped several benefits. They were privy to information prior to most students, they were able to interact with faculty and staff frequently and on a deeper level than most students, and they were able to develop a strong network of friendships, some of which they continue to maintain. With regard to their involvement on campus, a number of students shared that their BMI engagement helped support their ability and opportunities to integrate on campus. Each participant apparently valued their peer interactions and campus engagement regardless of their prior feelings about the person, organization, or personal growth that served as the vehicle and catalyst for these connections and experiences.

Theme 4: Holistic Support Provided Through the BMI

The fourth theme that emerged from the analysis was holistic support to students, which is a salient way that BMIs can increase the retention and success of Black male students. Participants noted that providing them with information about cultural, academic, and social resources at their respective community colleges was critical to

them feeling like valued and supported members of the program. From introducing them to critical campus resources and providing students with access to powerful institutional leaders, to establishing an intimate family situated within a larger student population, students felt inspired, edified, and expressed a deepened sense of belonging and connectedness. Involvement in the BMI provided these men with opportunities for mentoring, academic support, networking, identity development, navigational capital, community engagement, and promoted a positive image of men of color.

Students valued opportunities to make connections with other students, faculty and staff during their community college tenure. Many noted that those opportunities eased some of the stress and anxiety of transitioning to college. Kaman elaborated,

> Because of the relationships I got to build and got to see some of the new guys coming in and understanding that although they can help me, I just want to be there to help them as well. Just give back, the same way some of the other guys gave back to me and helped me out in some of my situations when I first showed up on the scene [campus]. Those times could have been much more stressful had I not had those connections.

Similar to Kaman's thoughts on the connections made and support derived from those connections, Craig recalls spending substantial amounts of time with the other students in the program. He went as far to describe how he felt as if the BMI was an extension of his family. Craig shared,

> It felt like you were just meeting with your other family like every other day, like you all would share laughs and things that you can remember forever because you don't share those with just anybody, like having those experiences, eating lunch with them, talking to them about things that just bother you. You don't just do that with anybody, so after you do that for so long, you start to consider people family at that point. It definitely enhanced my experience.

The mentoring opportunities available through the BMI provided a high level of support from which these men continue to benefit. The BMI programs referenced in this study provide students with a faculty or staff mentor. The study participants describe

these mentoring relationships as providing invaluable support to them as they navigated community college and grew into manhood. Their mentors were fondly described as being like fathers, uncles, and brothers. While many of the participants came from families where their father was present, they still relished the opportunity to connect deeply with another man of color. They recounted the deep discussions, friendly demeanors, accessibility, and the heightened sense of accountability they derived from these meaningful relationships with BMI mentors. Kaman recalled his experiences with the mentors:

> It came with time. Just meeting those men and building relationships with those guys, I grew really fond of them. I really got to enjoy their presence and really loved them. Can I talk about the reason I stayed in the BMI? Well, it was really the people there. I really loved my mentors and program staff. I love them. It's was also good to see them outside of the classroom, outside of those meetings in the hallways and getting to socialize with them.

Support in the area of academic performance was noted and appreciated by several participants. They described a heightened level of accountability and encouragement to stay on track and remain focused on academic pursuits. This accountability was felt in the classroom, on campus, and in the BMI. It served to support their success as students, and they acknowledge the role it played in successfully becoming responsible men. Benson enthusiastically recalled a turning point for him as a student that lacked personal and academic discipline. After having heard these messages from his parents before, he recounts finally listening to the admonishment the BMI provided about getting focused and on course for academic success:

> The BMI was the turning point when I was like, okay I've got to stop playing around," because the BMI was like ... they were saying a lot of things my parents were saying, but I wasn't listening to them. I was listening to the BMI for some reason.

Another area of support mentioned by participants was the academic planning and the tools for navigating college academic life. It's important to note that several participants preferred to seek the academic advice and direction from BMI mentors and program staff rather than from a campus academic advisor or career center. Kaman offered,

> I would go to my support coach Richard. We actually did have academic advisors here and there on campus, and there were times that I went to see a counselor, but most of the time I went to the BMI office because they understood me, you know like understood my direction. He got it and I went to him over and over for advice. It was advice for classes and for personal stuff, and it was just better than talking to a random advisor in the counseling center.

Some participants indicated that they did not need much academic support while others needed higher levels of support. This support came from tutors, faculty, and other students. They appreciated the warm and inviting nature of the BMI staff members. They recall engaging in conversations during BMI activities and events about their academic performance and responsibilities. In particular, participants noted that the BMI's atmosphere of caring and empowerment improved their help-seeking behaviors and encouraged them to communicate more with their faculty members, tutors, and other experts. In some cases, they were required to communicate with faculty members because the BMI mandated that members obtain progress reports and other academic related tasks and activities. Several participants noted being required to spend a certain number of hours in BMI study groups as a condition of membership and to remain eligible for certain incentives and rites of passage. Arlen recalled,

> Yeah, the BMI required us to go to participate in study groups for a certain number of hours a week. If we didn't, we couldn't go on some of the outings or earn our BMI stuff. We had stuff with the BMI name on it and it was dope stuff like bow ties, pins, and shirts. This stuff, even though I didn't really want to do it at first, it really helped me school wise because I went from not liking it to it becoming my M.O. [modus operandi].

Dawson recalled the change he experienced in his approach to seeking help from faculty when he encountered challenges:

> Yeah, yeah definitely when I first came to college in fall 2015, I had a mindset of singularity. I'm just going to do this by myself. If I have an issue, I'm going to deal with it myself. That's what really hurt me in the Math class that I took, but after joining the BMI and being in so many classes and interacting with professors and having relationships and seeing that they are people too, I soon was okay with going to talk to them if I needed them. Whether it was for private support or if I needed to ask them about an assignment, I knew I could ask them or shoot them an email.

Ken, of Success Community College, replied immediately and succinctly to a question about what contributed to his academic success while in college, “the BMI, number one, first and foremost.”

Participants noted the extensive social support provided by the BMI that came in the form of what they repeatedly referred to as “brotherhood.” Many participants noted that they joined the BMI as a result of already having a relationship with one of the student members. They also referenced feeling very strong connections with the other men in the program, to the point of feeling closer to them than they felt to some of their biological family members. They described the feelings of safety, support, accountability, and transparency experienced as a result of their relationships within the BMI. Upon reflecting on the social support Todd received, he recalled,

> We would say we're BMI brothers and it was like you could see that bond. I could say hi to somebody else in my class but when I saw a brother of the BMI, it was different. You could see that spark, feel the connection, and it stuck out.

Many participants noted the motivation and reinforcement they received from the BMI, especially during challenging life circumstances. Adam noted,

> Just having that support when you are feeling down, or you just want somebody to talk to, and it's there. Just having that support, it really helps when you're going through tough times or when you just feel like you can't do it, that one person just

> saying you can do it or you're better than this, or you know what you're doing. Just motivational stuff, it's really beneficial on both parts.

The concept of the BMI serving as surrogate family surfaced often during participant interviews. In speaking about the social support or brotherhood that he experienced while a member of the BMI on his campus, Adam acknowledged that the BMI fostered a supportive atmosphere among the students. He recalled,

> And then as far as relationships goes, two of my best friends were in the BMI. Just establishing relationships like that, me not having any brothers ... blood brothers, just having that relationship with them, I just feel like I now have blood brothers because I know through anything, they will be there for me and I'll be there for them.

One participant admitted that he was drawn to join the BMI because of the support and brotherhood that he witnessed among the members. Todd explained,

> I saw their sense of brotherhood and how they connected, and I connected with them all. At the same time, I was like it wasn't the same connection because I wasn't yet a part of the BMI at the time. As you know, these guys are amazing. I connected with them each in different ways, and I decided I was gonna give it [BMI] a try.

Support for all, regardless of sexual orientation was a noted hallmark of the BMI for one participant. He acknowledged the comfort he experienced and respect that he received from a group of very caring, to his knowledge, heterosexual men. Ken, of Graduation Community College, recalled and commented in a way that indicated how pleasantly surprised he was to be treated as an equal member of the group even as a homosexual male:

> I was always a part of the conversation. I was always respected. Being as though, you know, this was mostly like, you know, heterosexual males and I identify as a homosexual male, I never felt like I didn't have a seat at the table. It was always you know, they always respected my opinion and my voice, and I appreciated that. It was always something that they wanted to know more about because they wanted to understand more about my sexuality because they wanted to know what would make me feel uncomfortable or you know, or is this the right term, or something like that. I appreciate that because I feel like to this day, that has made

> me feel comfortable and not feel awkward about anything, you know. It was good to feel always a part of the group.

Ken's comments demonstrate the power of the brotherhood that existed and the atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion in the BMI. This is particularly noteworthy in that he was able to find a home and make connections with his heterosexual peers. He was able to be fully involved in the group without feeling like he was on the fringes or being alienated due to a lack of understanding or homophobia. Ken described feeling connected to BMI staff and students and his sexual identity being respected and embraced.

Many participants shared that the BMI provided them with unique opportunities to develop community with and among Black males, often times through participating in group community service projects and bonding opportunities like off-campus retreats. They were able to bond, share aspirations, and hear stories from other Black males about how they were persisting and realizing academic and personal success. Students discussed how meeting and building relationships with their Black male peers enhanced both their BMI and overall college experiences and supported their success to and beyond graduation.

Theme 5: Powerful Mentoring Relationships

Mentoring programs provide support systems that foster success for Black male students. For example, Black males who have mentors tend to show higher self-esteem and higher levels of academic motivation and performance. They also demonstrate improvement in social skills because participants gain confidence in safe environments and feel more comfortable communicating with college faculty and staff (LaVant et al., 1997). In addition, evidence shows that when Black males have been given the

opportunity to participate in higher education and when well-formatted support systems, such as mentoring programs are in place, they have been successful, thereby increasing access and equity for these men (Harris, 1996).

Most BMIs include some type of individual or group mentoring component. The participants in this study, consistently acknowledged the power of their relationships with the mentors and BMI staff. One of the BMIs referenced in this study described referred to their mentors as "Support Coaches." Overall, study participants derived a tremendous amount of support, nurturing, and guidance from their relationship with their mentors. Many participants used the word father when describing how they experienced the mentoring aspect of the BMI. It's important to note that this term was used by those that had fathers in their lives and those that did not. They felt a closeness and trustworthiness that made them feel safe to share and learn from these older men. They realized that these men had already attended college and had already encountered many of the same experiences that they were beginning to encounter. They knew that the mentors genuinely cared about them and always had their best interest in mind.

Furthermore, several participants mentioned just how accessible the mentors were and how easy it was to communicate with them about academic, personal, or social issues. Many Black male students arrive at college campuses confused, intimidated, and experience feelings of isolation (Mason, 1998). The BMI mentors helped to alleviate or eliminate these feelings by listening, providing structured support, and helping them to acculturate to a new and often unfamiliar environment.

Adam, of Success Community College, expressed his feelings about the core of the relationship that he had with his mentors. He described the core of the relationship as

love. He also described it as a reciprocal relationship; they would do anything for him, and he would do anything for them. He recalled,

> We all had a different relationship, but I guess the solid thing was is that we all love each other. I know at the end of the day, they only want the best for me. Well, they have the best intentions for me. Then I know if I needed anything, I can turn to them or I can even say that if they needed anything, they could turn to me. I'm pretty sure at their point in life they don't need anything that I have to offer them, but I was just like I'm here if you need it. I wanted them to know that I would do anything for them too.

Benson, who grew up in a mostly female environment, described just how much he appreciated the way that his mentors communicated with him. He respected and appreciated the approach they would take to correct him, encourage him, or simply listen. An approach he described as characteristic of how men communicate. During his interview, he shared,

> I would say they were like older brothers in a way, because I don't have an older brother. So, they are like the closest things that I do have. I have three older sisters. Emotionally, sisters are kind of like crying and yelling and they're like frustrated saying, why are you acting like this? You need to stop acting like a fool. Whereas as men and older brothers, it's kind of a sit down, yo, what are you doing? It's calmer and it resonates deeper and it's like, yo, we're here to help. You feel inspired after these talks and they kind of pinpoint the situation and the relationships remain the same after. I just found my mentors to be more level-headed and easier to talk to, even if I was in the wrong.

Similarly, Arlen recalls how much he appreciated the way that his mentors communicated with him, specifically the safe space that they created and the non-judgmental listening they provided. Arlen acknowledged his appreciation and the qualities of his mentoring relationship in the following way:

> There was no one, there was no one, that I didn't feel I couldn't talk to about anything. If there was ever something going on in my life, I feel like they were all ears. They weren’t going to judge you. They were not going to think of you any differently, so I definitely think that it's like another family member, someone that you can just talk to about anything. I think it was a great connection.

Much like Arlen, Kaman noted the powerful, supportive, and easygoing nature of his relationship with his mentors. He recognized that these were men that were in many ways just like him, except for the fact that they were older and had more life experience. He stated,

> When you just get in there, you just see them as just mentors that you may have happened to see in the hallways. After a while you shake hands and you get to know them better. Once again, you understand, okay this guy is just like me. Just a bit older and he's lived life obviously a lot longer. He has more experience than me. I'm sure he wants me to succeed.

Arlen also spoke about how he enjoyed his relationship with his mentors, how he was inspired, and they provided him with so much insight and perspective, even when it came in very subtle ways:

> I enjoyed my relationships with my mentors. I really got to know them as people and I really enjoyed their presence due to just a nod that they bestowed upon me from time to time. I can't tell you how many times I have gone to them and have gained so much perspective whether it be socially or about my transitioning into a four-year college or whether it just be about family and things of that nature. Just having those relationships with my mentors was great. I know I can turn to them about anything and that was great.

Several participants in this study described being inspired by the success of their mentors. They were inspired seeing someone that talked like them, looked like them, and had similar sociocultural backgrounds. They looked to them as men who have been in their shoes and now have come to a place where they can share invaluable wisdom and provide support. It was evident that many of them particularly found inspiration in the educational attainment of their mentors and realized if their mentors could do it, then they could do it too. One participant described what he felt when he realized the breadth of the educational success his mentors had attained. Ken’s comments vividly described his feelings about his mentors and how he viewed them as educational role models:

> They show us how important education is and we had these role models and we don't see this on an everyday basis. We see, you know, so when you step in there, it's like you've stepped into paradise almost. Ok, maybe not paradise, but it's more of a learning, like a learning experience. It's, it's inspiring, inspiring.

As they reflected upon the relationships that they had with their mentors, several students used the word father or uncle to describe the closeness they felt. Some participants that used these words to describe their mentors were from homes where they had a father present and some where there was no father present, so it was powerful to hear them refer to them as father and uncle figures regardless of their own family structure. Dawson described the unique and changing nature of his relationship with his mentor as his mentor was also an academic advisor on campus. He shared, "Mr. Johnson who also was my adviser, he served like a father figure, or like an uncle figure for me, a big brother even." Participants in this study used family terms quite often to describe their relationship with their mentors. Another participant by the name of Terrell, not only referred to his mentor as like a family member but also shared a unique observation. He realized that the mentors were also under a tremendous amount of pressure to be good mentors and to hold up to their end of the relationship. He referenced that it must not be easy to have so many young men looking up to you for encouragement and guidance. He commented,

> They go to you for that advice. They're going to go to you because they see you as a beacon. One thing I did not know coming into the BMI, a lot of the brothers don't have a father figure to look up to and they go to (Mentor's Name). Being that father figure that is a lot of responsibility and that is literally the best way to put it, you are literally having grown men coming to you and look at you as their father and it's a heavy tax.

Isaac reflected on how powerful it was to be validated by an older Black male that he respected. He recognized that the reinforcing words that he and others received from

BMI mentors was rare, yet valuable. Isaac simply and profoundly described this powerful aspect of the BMI:

> Well, I think we'd be surprised how, how much power is in one Black man telling another Black man they're important, you know, I don't think that we have that in a society and even in the community because us as men, we're supposed to be like these others, its more about our actions than our words, you know, but as children, um, words are really the only thing that we have.

The data represented within this major theme illustrate countless mentions of how meaningful and impactful the mentoring relationships were as the participants navigated the community college experience. They describe mentors as being like father, brother, uncle, friend, and coach. In some cases, these mentors filled voids as a result of not having these types of figures in their natural families and in some cases, they served as extensions of the positive male figures already present in their lives. Regardless of the case, all of the participants could easily and clearly articulate the power of their mentoring relationships, the unconditional positive regard that they received, and the impact that it had on their success and overall growth as men.

Theme 6: Personal Growth and Change

The sixth theme that emerged from the data was the personal growth and change that participants experienced while attending community college and participating in the BMI. The participants reflected upon how they developed a sense of purpose, built resilience through challenges, and developed a sense of appreciation for community service; and for some, they finally felt like they had a voice in the world. Furthermore, they shared how these lessons learned have made a lasting impact as they continue to draw upon those lessons as they navigate their four-year college experiences and manhood in general.

Ken recalled starting college and through joining the BMI that he would gain a sense of purpose and direction for his life. He shared,

> And it was like once I started community college and the BMI in the summertime, I felt like, okay, I'm going to grow a purpose. I latched onto a movement. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was a good feeling. I felt like I was becoming educated. I felt like I was being beginning to understand my purpose.

No participant could reflect upon their community college experiences without recalling the challenges that they encountered; however, participants consistently recalled the resilience they developed and the support received from the BMI and their mentors who had already encountered and overcome similar challenges. They quickly learned that navigating college and life was not an easy task, but it was made more manageable through the support received from their BMI network and the constant push to remain strong and be successful. Kenneth offered the following thought about the strength and resilience he developed in order to overcome certain obstacles:

> I always told myself, it may be hard right now but at the end of the day, I'm not going to satisfy somebody else when seeing me fail. I'm going to push, and push, until I make it. One way or another, I have learned that I'm going to get through it.

Similarly, Arlen offered his perspective on the challenges you may face and how important it is to remember that you can achieve it if you lean on your supports and devote yourself to your goals. Arlen shares some powerful thoughts about what you can accomplish with a resilient attitude and finding strength in the stories of role models:

> I mean, there's [sic] so many people whose stories you don’t know. You just see their positions, you don't realize that they had a hard life coming up, too. So, look at your role models. Maybe figure out where they came from. So many athletes, even athletes, they've gotten good grades, but growing up it was hard. If they can do it, why can't you? Maybe if they didn't have this skill, do you think they would still be successful? Probably, because they have that drive, and that's the type of drive that you need. Even if you're giving it your all, and you're maybe having a mediocre college career, at least you can say you tried your best.

Kaman recalled how his mentor used a tough love approach when he was apprehensive about his success in a particular course. He appreciated the push and realized that even in the face of doubt and apprehension, if he put the work into it, it always worked out. He affectionately recalled,

> I can't tell you how many times, I did question myself and wonder if [I] can really finish or is this class really for me, or should I just take it next semester. Those guys [mentors] tell you, no. Dude you can do it. Stop complaining. I can't tell you how many times I would register for a class and Bob[mentor] would be like, yo stop complaining, you'll be fine. And strangely enough, I was always fine.

Community service is a hallmark of most college BMI programs. They promote community service and engagement by instilling the importance of giving back and by providing individual and group opportunities as a service vehicle for these men. Many participants recalled receiving inspiration and a sense of purpose through these experiences, feelings that still remain and shape how they continue to live their lives. Not only was it an opportunity to serve, but equally important, an opportunity to bond with the men they worked alongside during these service activities and events. When asked about the most memorable BMI event he had participated in and how it exceeded his expectations for being worth his time, Kenneth responded,

> Stop Hunger Now, that to me was the event that I really most appreciated because we spent a holiday where I could have been with family and having like a cookout or something, but instead decided to spend a good portion of the day just going to campus packaging, boxing up, and taping food boxes to send to other countries. Just doing this activity, which at first my thought was like man I don't know if want to spend that free day like this. After it was over, I was like, it was amazing.

Dawson echoed similar thoughts regarding this community service experiences. He was sure to add even though he wanted to give back, he did not feel he would have gotten involved in this service and other service activities had the BMI not served as the catalyst and provided the opportunity for its members. He first had the experience with

the BMI and then extended his ability into planning a service experience for another organization. He recalled the sense of pride and awareness that this experience left him feeling:

> I was able, through the BMI, to do a lot of community service, which is something that I always wanted to do but for whatever reason just hadn't jumped in to. When I did the activity through the BMI, that was very fulfilling for me and also just showed me the heaviest causes that are out there. This past Thanksgiving, I was able to organize something similar working within another organization and we ended up going there and we helped them distribute food and make food packages and stuff like that. Once again, I think from the outside looking in, that was something I would not have had an opportunity to do.

Kenneth recalled the meaning he made of his community service experiences with the BMI and he simply yet profoundly stated, “bonding is what happened while we're doing volunteer community service, we bonded over that. That helped my desire to do more community service and grow.”

Adam fondly shared his reflection of the value and meaning of his community service experiences through the BMI, even though he thought it was something that he would never do with this free time:

> We also had community involvement, things that I never thought I'd really do initially. So, it was really awkward at first trying to say I'm going to spend my free day going out and volunteering. I never thought I'd do that, but it was such a great experience.

Finally, to underscore the benefits these men drew from their participation in community service, Dawson when asked if there was anything, he would change about the BMI program, responded,

> I would have us do more community service because each semester we did about two events. I'd definitely increase that. I know some people need that for a program where they have to show how many hours they logged, but I think it really does generally give people something meaningful. I know, I know it might sound biased because I keep talking about community service, but those events, like I genuinely loved them.

In addition to the growth and change that resulted as a result of community service experiences, several participants mentioned how they finally felt as if they had a voice in the world. They felt that the knowledge they gained and the contributions they made to their local community gave voice and meaning to their existence.

Todd spoke of the voice, confidence, and empowerment that he gained as he made meaning of his community college BMI experience:

> Don't be a follower, try to be as big of a leader as you can. You may have to follow a little bit, but don't follow right behind somebody to be honest, and don't be afraid to ask for help. I mean being a minority male, they want us to be closed in and not ask for help, they want us to just try to do everything by ourselves, but we already got a chip on our shoulders so why not use your resources and your connections and try to branch out. Don't be afraid of nobody because I mean what they going to do? Only thing they can do is say no.

Whether it was becoming more resilient through overcoming challenges and obstacles or learning the importance, value, and lasting impact of community service, participants reported experiencing significant growth, change, and sense of purpose during their community college experience, primarily through the support, learning, and exposure provided by the BMI.

Theme 7: BMI Exceeded Expectations: Appraisal, Value, and Meaning

As the researcher explored the engagement experiences and perceptions of the study participants, these men provided rich descriptions of their perceptions of the benefits and value of the program and how it supported their college success efforts, and in many cases, exceeded their expectations. Many of them commented on how their lives would have been different if they had not joined the program. Some went as far to say that they felt they would not have persisted and graduated had it not been for being a part of such a tremendous support system. Phrases like, “it kept me in school,” “changed my

perspective on life and manhood," and "it provided accountability and inspiration" indicate the value and power derived from their experiences in the BMI while attending community college.

One main reason participants gave for valuing their BMI participation was the program provided them with accountability and inspiration for their college success efforts. They shared how important they found it to have someone or a group of people reliably keep them on track with regards to their educational goals. Kenneth shared his strong feelings about the unconditional support he received from his brothers:

> We had a brotherhood bond that we had together where I know they would back me up in anything that went down, or I would back them up, and at the same time we would keep each other in check.

Kaman commented on the accountability that came naturally as a result of being a member of the BMI. She shared that even if someone didn't know his name, they knew he was a part of the BMI, and that came with a level of accountability and responsibility. He shared the following thoughts:

> It actually helped me stay on track too, because when you're a part of [BMI], the faculty know who you are. They remember those faces. They may not remember your name, but they know, "Okay, that's that kid from [BMI]. I don't know his name, but you know what, I'm watching him, and I know who to go to if he's messing up or he has issues and he doesn't want to tell anybody." So, with that understanding that I knew I had people focused on what I was doing, even if they may not have been, I just felt that way, that they were watching me. I understand that they wanted me to succeed and expected a certain level of excellence from me. That helped me stay on track, knowing that they knew who I was and who I represented in succeeding. Because they know what the [BMI] represents. They see what we do. They see the conversations that we have in terms of the betterment of and growth of young individuals transitioning to their manhood. They know what we need to do, and they know what is expected of us, especially from our mentors. And if our mentors were not around, they took that step to come forth and make sure that we're on track and achieving what we need to achieve. There was always that person behind us, watching us, and making sure that we're doing whatever we needed to be doing.

During the interview, he spoke about the healthy competition that existed amongst the students in the BMI. A competition, but more importantly, the power of being surrounded by like-minded individuals with similar goals and aspirations. He shared,

> It's healthy competition. What I mean by that is having my peers around me succeeding and looking at myself and assessing myself as a person and seeing that truth be told they are amazing people but they're not better than me. If not better than me, than why am I not able to achieve in the same fashion? Just having those guys go out and handle their business, it makes me want to handle my business too because I want to be in the same position.

Similarly, Ken shared the meaning that he made of the support and accountability that he gleaned during his time as a student and as a member of the BMI:

> At [BMI] I was able to be around people, inspiring people and so I wanted to stay within that community and understand myself. Being around other Black men and having the same vision, the same goal, we were all striving for greatness and that brotherhood is something that it's so strong, it's really strong. I wanted to keep that because I feel like that brotherhood is what has helped me to progress. It's something that you can't necessarily get from other organizations. You can't get that, especially being a Black male in today's society. You need that support. People that understand you, who are like you.

A few participants also referenced how the BMI helped to keep them focused and on track academically. They may have encountered obstacles that had them considering stopping or dropping out, but through the BMI, they were encouraged to stay the course, graduate, and move on to the next stage in life.

Ken offered his thoughts related to the value and meaning of his membership in the BMI. He describes having learning challenges and needing tremendous support to keep going. The BMI provided this support, support allowed him to persist to his goals, in spite of this learning challenges. He provided the following thoughts when asked if he thinks his community college experience would have been the same had he not been a part of the BMI:

> Um, I don't think it would've, it would've been a little bit challenging for me. My learning style... well I require a lot of support and so I feel like without the [BMI] I would have been lacking support. I would have been struggling a lot. From trying to figure out what classes to choose from who to go to for personal issues and things like that, I would have been lost. So yeah, I feel like without that support, no, I don't think I would have been where I am today, honestly.

It was evident through the interview responses that many participants felt like the BMI changed their perspective on life and how to live it. It provided a new lens through which to view the characteristics necessary for college success and overall success as a man. One participant discussed how the BMI changed the way he now moves throughout his life, his planning, and his pursuits have all been shaped by the lessons learned from his experiences with the BMI. He shared the following thoughts related to how his life is now better as a result of the BMI:

> That's what [BMI] did, it put me in that position. Right now, I'm actually developing five-year and ten-year plans. I wouldn't be doing that kind of stuff. I wouldn't be thinking out five years from now where I want to be or how do I want to be financially? I want to be able to be done with student loans in the next 10 years. Those things wouldn't be on my mind if I wasn't for what was learned in [BMI].

Another common thread among the responses from participants when asked about some of the most meaningful outcomes of their participation in the program was how it transformed their lives, how it transformed them into young men that could be proud to be Black men in today's society. It was common to hear them mention how being a part of such a powerful movement changed the way that others viewed them as well as how they viewed themselves as men of color. Todd shared how the BMI helped to break down the stereotype that many have of Black men. He stated, "and also to break down that stereotype, that all minorities do this and that, but oh no look at the [BMI] students, they're actually in class. They're doing everything they're supposed to do." This was a feeling shared by several participants, a feeling of validation and fresh perspective.

Finally, Arlen shared the gifts and lessons that membership in the BMI bestowed upon him. He highlights the empowerment, values, and major takeaways that fostered his success and continues to impact his life now. When asked what advice he would share with a young Black male about to begin community college, he shared,

> I think, what I would say to someone coming into [BMI], whether they think they hit rock bottom or whatever, is you can only get better, and you will get better in something. It may not be academics. It may not be leadership or anything, but it will be something. Everyone in [BMI] is here to bring you up, and they will, so that's one of the things that I think everyone will take away from it. Me personally, I think it was the leadership and just the understanding of others.

Participants' reflections offer powerful narratives about the role that the BMI played in establishing, connecting, and raising their educational and personal goals. They refer to their respective BMIs as powerful and nurturing cohorts that provided tremendous academic and social support, access to critical resources on campus and in the community, tools for personal development, opportunities for bonding with Black males, and for many, a wake-up call and a catalyst for wanting to live their best lives. For many of the participants, even though they have graduated and transferred to a four-year college, they still rely upon the foundations of success that the BMI fostered and the pride that it instilled while they attended community college.

Theme 8: Perceptions of BMI Program Structure

Much like the majority of BMIs across the country, the BMI programs in this study are mentorship-based programs designed to motivate and support academic success for men of color on their respective campuses. The programs were created to specifically address the growing concern for African American men's declining college enrollment, academic disengagement, academic underachievement, and overall low rate of degree completion. BMIs accomplish this by applying anti-deficit approaches using program

models and interventions that build a viable foundation for academic success and character development, thereby producing educated men who will make positive contributions to society. While the goals and purpose of these programs are similar across institutions, program design varies. In this study, the researcher defines program design as the way in which BMIs are structured to include, but not limited to, staffing, mentoring approaches, program activities and events, member requirements and benefits, meeting frequency, number of students, and physical space.

During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect upon their participation in the BMI. The researcher took this opportunity to ask probing questions about the design of the program and if there is anything that they would add, strengthen, change, or remove from the BMI. Most participants did not have anything that they would change but rather had recommendations for how to strengthen the program whether it be through increasing the frequency of certain activities or the importance of having dedicated physical space on campus for BMI administrative offices and activities.

The BMI at both Success Community College and Graduation Community College provide mentors for their students. They are referred to as mentors at Success Community College and as support coaches at Graduation Community College. In both cases, they are faculty or staff members. The support coaches at GCC are employed by the BMI and the mentors at SCC are faculty and staff members that voluntarily serves as mentors and program leaders. Ken was a member of the BMI at Graduation Community College and shared his feelings regarding the staffing for the program. He mentions how there are so many students that all want to get in to talk with the support coaches, but there needs to be more coaches available due to the demand on their time from other

students. He feels that the BMI should have more support coaches for a program that size:

> Only thing I may say would be to have more support coaches. I know we need more people. Because we get students in this program all the time and sometimes you know we're fighting over who can get in to talk to them.

Arlen was a member of the BMI at Success Community College and he shared his thoughts about the need to have program staff that serve as mentors and program leaders in which it is their full-time job and not something that they do in addition to their roles as faculty or support staff:

> Yeah, I feel like we needed to have some more mentors we could go to. Don't get me wrong, the mentors we had were good and they seemed to always somehow be there for me, but I could tell that they were busy, and most times needed help with doing things for us and just trying to handle their own jobs too, you know what I mean. Yea they would listen to us, but they also had to run [BMI] too. I honestly don't know how they got it all done.

Study participants were also asked to reflect upon particular BMI events, activities, or other program components that they found to be enjoyable and instrumental to their academic and personal success. Many BMIs provide some type of off-campus retreat or field experience for the students in their program. The retreats generally required the students to travel a few hours away from campus to a rural setting. The participants described taking buses to these off-campus experiences and sleeping and eating in dormitory or campground style accommodations. Riding on buses or vans together provided time to bond and get to know fellow members in different ways. Some participants also mentioned that it allowed them to see the mentors and program leaders in a different space and connect with them on a deeper level. They described the retreats as being a blend of fun social or athletic activities with workshops that focused on academic success and personal development. Several students shared fond memories of

the retreats they attended where they commented on the memorable and valuable learning and bonding experiences the retreats provided.

It is quite common for BMI programs to repeat program offerings each year. For example, most programs have annual community service projects, campus events, retreats, and academic support offerings. Additionally, some programs cover the same or similar academic, personal, and social development topics through workshops, mini-conferences, and other campus events each academic year. While participants found these workshops and other program offerings to be beneficial, some mentioned that they would have liked to see the topics covered and program offerings change from year to year as not to feel like they were repeating the experiences and learning from the previous year. Arlen made a recommendation as to how he feels his BMI could have structured the program so that the programming experience could be different for students in the first and second years of the program respectively:

> The workshops. I know sometimes things would be repetitive, but then it's only because there would be new members and they don't know the stuff. When I first joined, I learned a lot of things. As far as how to tie a tie, what a tie bar is for, how to properly buy a suit, and how to properly wear the suit. I learned how to give off the right message in class, how to use my resources, just little things like that. That really helped me get to the next level, cause now that I use all those skills, people ... I wouldn't say look at me different, but they look at me more positively. So maybe [BMI] should set it up so that the guys coming back for the second year in the program can learn new and different things from the students just joining for the first time. I know I would like for it to have been like that, so it didn’t seem like a repeat of what we learned the year before, but I learned a lot anyway.

While Arlen shared that he found the workshops to be one of the most beneficial aspects of the BMI, he also mentions that it became repetitive for him. He understood that it was because there were new members that joined, and they also needed to learn what he had learned. This may have implications for BMI faculty and staff leaders as

they design programming in a way that could offer new learning experiences for its members each academic year.

Similarly, Benson mentioned feeling as if the workshops and guest speakers was one of the most beneficial learning experiences for him. He appreciated the guests that came to spend time with the group in order to share knowledge and wisdom and help them become better men. He noted that in many cases, he was able to even keep in touch with the guests; he described them becoming almost like additional mentors and role models. He recalled,

> Just listening [to] them [the guest speakers] get up there and talk and the guest speakers coming through and talking to us. I think those were my favorite days when we had a guest speaker come by because it was just like, okay here's one more person that cares and you don't get a lot of that unless you are put in a position to see it or experience it like in the program. The speakers were always somebody we could look up to and sometimes we could even stay in touch with them. I guess that's when we could really see networking at work.

BMIs vary in size across institutions. Some are small and have under 15 students and some are larger and have 40 or more students. The two programs in this study are both located at large, multi-campus, community colleges and have an average BMI membership of 30 to 50 students annually. When asked if there was anything that they would change about the BMI, some participants shared their observations and thoughts regarding the number of members in their BMI program. Benson shared the following thoughts regarding as he reflected on the size of the BMI:

> The challenge is I feel like you're not really learning about someone when the groups is too big because there are so many people to learn from or to grow close with. With the 15 or 20 that we had initially, it was impossible for your personality to not come out or for somebody to be like, what's up with this guy? With 60 or 40 or 50 people or however many it's up to now, which is a great thing, it's very easy to zone out because you know there's 20 or 30 other people that are going to be looking after him. You didn't really have a chance to just sit 10 people around the table and really zone in on what they're saying. With the larger group, you weren't really hearing them. It was in one ear, out the other.

> That was just my experience when I came and started sitting in meetings. I was like, that's a lot of people. It's cool, I just wondered what their perception was... are these people really feeling each other out, are they really making true connections or is it just surface?

Benson felt that the size of the group needs to be large enough to experience the richness and diversity of membership but small enough for members not to get lost in the shuffle and be able to make deep meaningful connections.

Dawson also shared his recollection and reflections on the number of members in the BMI. Much like Benson, he had feelings about programs that are too small and, in his opinion, those that are too large in membership. His thoughts were that it is very easy for cliques to form when the group is large, which makes it easier for some students to get lost in the shuffle or go under the radar, potentially resulting in some members remaining on the fringes and preventing significant relationships from being formed. Dawson recalled,

> But when you have so many different people you see those cliques form. Those cliques are gonna form, regardless, but I just think your increasing the likelihood of those cliques forming if it's so big. If it's a big group and once you have your set number of friends, you're gonna stick with them and then your kind of disregarding all the good stuff that can happen out there through meeting other people. If I just stuck with the people that I knew, I would never talked to Renaldo, I would have never talked to Kaman. I wouldn't have gotten so close to Craig and Adam as I am. I would have just found one or two specific people and stuck with them. But because I think our size was smaller, I really did get a chance to know everybody.

BMIs, just as the name indicates, are designed to serve and support Black or minority males. There are some institutions of higher education that may not have a BMI but have a minority student support group or group mentoring program designed to support both males and female students of color. The researcher posed several probes to participants as they reflected upon their BMI and how it was structured or designed. One participant in particular, was asked about his thoughts regarding the gender makeup of

such a program designed to support student success. While he felt that female students could definitely benefit from the learning, exposure, and support provided, the single gender program provides a much safer environment for sharing, learning, and growing. Craig shared the following about the gender make up of minority student support programs:

> The fact that [BMI] was geared towards minority males, that's really one of the factors and not to sound like sexist or anything, but the fact that it's all guys and we all go through the same thing, it definitely creates something rather than it being like guys and girls because you can't talk to girls about certain things, and they can't talk to you about certain things. The fact that we can all talk to each other about something and be open to each other and we've all cried in front of each other and stuff, that's something that other programs don't get especially with the role models and the mentors being the same color as the students. This is important, and we know we are still boys even after we share about our past, cry or get upset in front of each other.

BMI programs are often led and supported by college teaching faculty and student affairs administrators and/or support staff. The leaders of these programs are not always student affairs professionals with the training and background in student development theory and other relevant training. When reflecting upon his experiences in his BMI, Kenneth admonished programs to be sure to have mentors and leaders that had the requisite skills, desire, and commitment to provide the appropriate guidance and support. This has implications for BMI staff or mentor selection and training. Kenneth recommends that leaders and mentors meet certain requirements through the following thoughts that he shared:

> So, to me the organizations are very valuable and very delicate. They need to be handled by people that have the skills, the desire, and the ability to actually fulfill it and meet their responsibilities. They need to make sure that these people, these men get where they need to go.

The BMI at Graduation Community College has a dedicated space in a building on campus to include several offices, cubicle work spaces, and a small classroom

designed for tutoring and academic work. During the interview, a few participants from their BMI shared how nice it was to have a space on campus that felt like home, a space where they knew they could go and get practically all their needs met. They could talk with mentors and program staff, get encouragement or inspiration, and have a place to be tutored or just get some homework done in a safe, familiar environment with their peers. On the other hand, some of the study participants that were members of the BMI at Success Community College mentioned how they would have liked to have a dedicated space on campus that they could call their own. A few of them recalled how many students liked to congregate in the Office of Student Activities on campus. They mentioned how much they enjoyed the time in that office and how the students would gather there for a sense of comradery and acceptance. They shared that the staff in that office were always welcoming, pleasant, and just always seemed eager to help in whatever way they could. As they pondered some of the things they would change about the BMI, Kaman shared,

> Yeah, one thing I would do is give [BMI] thier own space. We need like a room or place on campus where we can go, and study together or just talk. A place where we can have like our small committee meetings and get prepared for our service projects. It would have been nice if we had a place to store our banners, equipment, and other program stuff without worrying who would mess with it or having it locked away somewhere else on campus. Really to be honest, just a place kinda like the living room at your grandma's house. You can go there, be yourself, not be judged and know that people around you have your back.

It was apparent that the participants engaged in thoughtful reflection about the structure and components of the BMI that they experienced while attending community college. The data gleaned from the interviews provides an important window into their feelings and recommendations for the design of the program. The information provided

can serve as a guide to program leaders as they look to create a program or redesign a program to ensure maximum benefit and use of space for its student members.

This chapter presented the findings from a comprehensive analysis of 11 in-depth, semi-structured interviews detailing how Black men experienced their community college experience and membership in the BMI at their institution. The chapter began by providing the purpose of the research, a reiteration of the research questions, and followed with a presentation of eight themes that were extracted from the data. The major themes that emerged were a positive community college experience, significant faculty/staff relationships, peer interactions and campus engagement, holistic support, powerful mentoring relationships, personal growth and change, BMI exceeded expectations, and perceptions of program value, structure, and design. Overall, the data tells a collective story of how these men adapted to a new environment, navigated community college, and ultimately achieved their educational goals with the assistance and support of a BMI. Chapter five presents the results, conceptual framework, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Black Male Initiatives (BMIs) have proven to foster the academic and personal success of Black men in college by supporting increased retention and persistence (Palmer et al., 2010; Wood & Palmer, 2012). Much of the research on the success of Black male collegians is focused on their experiences at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2005; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Lucas, 2018; Palmer et al., 2010). However, there has been scant research on the success of these men in community colleges, and until recently, most of the published research has been from the quantitative research tradition. While quantitative research offers the advantage of generalizable findings, missing are important contextual insights and the voices of the men about and on whom this research has been conducted (Wood & Harris, 2014).

This study seeks to fill gaps in the literature on the success of Black men in community colleges by exploring a type of support system designed specifically to promote the academic and personal success of these students. This study amplifies the voice of Black male community college graduates, as they identify and describe the components of Black Male Initiatives (BMIs) and the community college experiences that they adjudge instrumental to their success. This chapter presents a summary of the study's findings and the themes that emerged from the data as outlined in Chapter Four. Furthermore, this chapter offers implications for policy, practice, and future research.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how Black male achievers experienced their overall community college experience and specifically how they made sense of their membership in a BMI. The findings expand previous research

that demonstrates the benefit of engaging in culturally-rich program (Druery & Brooms, 2018; Zell, 2011) and the importance of Black male bonding and peer support in college (McGowan, 2016; Strayhorn, 2017). The narrative that emerged from the study provides thick, rich insight into Black men's understandings of the components of BMI programs, the dimensions of their community college experiences, and the significant impact those factors had on their academic and personal success. The data that emerged from the study provides a solid foundation for determining the benefits these men received through their participation in a community college BMI. The findings of the study suggest several important conclusions. The study's central question, "how do Black male achievers describe and make meaning of their community college experience?" was addressed by examining the following sub-questions:

1) How do Black male achievers describe their experiences as members of a Black male initiative?
2) What factors within the Black male initiative influenced their success?
3) What factors beyond the Black male initiative influenced their success?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature and the conceptual framework that serves as an analytical tool for this study.

Key Study Findings

The key findings give voice to the participants' experiences as community college students and members of Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs. This study elucidates the intersection of these identities and how the BMI program was critical to their academic success and personal development. The major themes that emerged in the data were a positive community college experience, significant faculty/staff relationships, positive

peer interactions and campus engagement, holistic support, powerful mentoring relationships, significant personal growth and change, and perceptions of BMI program structure. These themes undergird the study findings, which provide answers to the overarching research question and the three sub-questions.

Research Question

The study's central question was, "how do Black male achievers describe and make meaning of their community college experience?" The participants in this study described their overall community college experience as positive and marked by fond memories and strong and lasting personal connections. They collectively reported that their experiences in the community college environment fostered a sense of purpose and belonging, while increasing their social capital. Jacoby and Garland (2004) posit that students who do not feel like they belong, seldom stay in college and graduate. Furthermore, they argue that students who do not have a sense of belonging complain that their college experience is like 'stopping by the mall' to get what they need on the way to somewhere else. This "shopping mall" experience can be prevalent at non-residential postsecondary institutions, which makes programs that promote belonging and engagement extremely important to retention and persistence at community colleges. Wood and Harris's (2014) noncognitive domain, one of their five domains of African American male student success, captures students' affective and emotional responses to social contexts and person-environment interactions that take place within or intersect their college experiences. A considerable portion of the data from this study falls within the noncognitive domain. Variables within the noncognitive domain tend to be psychosocial in nature and manifest in students' sense of belonging, self-efficacy, degree

of utility, and to whom or what they attribute the outcomes they experience (Wood & Harris, 2014). As participants recalled their community college experiences as members of a BMI, they fondly shared how they felt as if they belonged to a tightly knit community of support. Not only did they describe feeling a sense of belonging, but they revealed how their experiences served as confidence builders and fostered a sense of purpose. Participants went on to mention that they felt safe, supported, and challenged and appreciated the student diversity that existed at both community colleges that participants attended. Overall, they were all pleased with their decision to attend community college and satisfied with their academic and social experiences.

Sub Question 1. How do Black male achievers describe their experiences as members of a Black male initiative? The participants spoke warmly of their experiences as members of the BMI on their community college campus. Very powerful words and phrases were used as they reflected upon their experiences as members and what they gleaned during their time as members. Some of the participants described the BMI as a "life saver," as they felt their lives could have taken a different turn had it not been for their connection with the BMI. Additionally, they described feeling a strong sense of belonging or perceived social support on the campus and within the BMI. They felt as if they were cared for, accepted, and respected by the BMI students and mentors, which in their assessment, was the reason for so many of the positive outcomes they experienced and continue to experience. Within the literature on Black men in community colleges, Perrakis (2008) found that sense of belonging was a key factor influencing achievement for African American men. Sense of belonging defined as "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering

or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or others on campus" (Strayhorn, 2012a, p. 3). Hurtado and Carter (1997) also argue that sense of belonging is paramount to the retention and success of students of color in postsecondary education. To that end, when students of color feel a sense of connectedness or belonging within the institution, they are much more likely to maximize their potential and persist through to degree completion. The findings from this study suggests that having a meaningful connection to the campus is essential to achievement for Black male community college students. Overall, their BMI experiences are described as positive, inspiring, memorable, affirming, and empowering. None of the participants expressed negative feelings or experiences as a result of their participation in the BMI. In fact, they all reported being delighted to have joined the BMI and said that they would make the same choices if given the same opportunity. Additionally, some of the participants shared that when they were considering joining the BMI and during the very beginning of their membership experience, they underestimated the power and influence that this experience would have in their lives.

Sub Question 2. What factors within the Black male initiative influenced their success? This question provided insight into the components/aspects of the BMI that participants felt were crucial to their success. The participants collectively identified specific aspects of the program that they felt contributed to their academic and personal success and reinforced their conviction that active membership in the program was a positive and beneficial experience for them.

The participants recognized the impact of the formal and informal mentoring that they received through the BMI. Mentoring was regarded as the cornerstone of the

program and an opportunity to develop deep connections with men who looked like them, were older, and more experienced. The mentors were referred to by many participants as being just as important and integral to their growth and success as their biological family members. They relied heavily upon them for support, guidance, and to help them navigate the obstacles of life, particularly as men of color. This concept is referred to by researchers as fictive kin. Fictive kin relationships can be defined as relationships involving individuals who are not biologically related but who describe each other as relatives (Stewart, 2007). For many African Americans, extended kinship support and fictive kin relationships are an "adaptive strategy that allows for the sharing of resources" (Lamborn & Nguyen, 2004, p. 547). The men in this study underscored the importance of relying upon the mentors to share resources and information to assist with navigating higher education and their personal lives.

Historically, mentoring in higher education has proven to be a valuable and effective tool in promoting interaction between students and faculty. Black men in particular have reaped the benefits of formally structured mentoring programs at colleges and universities (LaVant, Anderson & Twiggs, 1997). Therefore, Black male college students' benefit from connections with college personnel, and such connections should be established during the early stages of enrollment, such as new student orientations (Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997). Several participants noted how beneficial it was to be connected to faculty and staff on campus while attending community college. They shared that the BMI served as the bridge that allowed them to develop supportive relationships with faculty and staff, which resulted in what they believe were increased opportunities for success in particular courses and overall academic success. Participants

noted that faculty and staff on campus seemed to view them in a much more positive light once they knew they were members of the BMI, which is contrary to the prevailing ideas and characteristics of Black males in predominately white spaces. Black males, like many other students of color at predominantly White institutions, are expected to experience psychological stress and have tumultuous college adjustment experiences (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Furthermore, low expectations from their K-12 teachers follow them into postsecondary education (Bonner & Bailey, 2006); thus, they often find themselves beset by the academic rigor of their courses and insufficiently prepared to meet their professors' expectations. However, the healthy and supportive relationships with faculty described by participants in this study resulted in increased opportunities for collaboration, higher expectations, and accountability.

The men in this study also described the BMI as providing a space for feeling safe to share their thoughts, deep feelings, and emotions in a space with their male peers. Thus, the participants unanimously felt that BMIs should be comprised of males and not include females as it may stifle or prevent deep disclosure in order to preserve masculinities. To enhance such bonding, according to study participants, BMIs should have dedicated space for activities, events, and where men can interact with their peers. The BMI at Graduation Community College has dedicated physical spaces. They have administrative offices, a multi-purpose room, and a classroom for tutoring and other academic activities. Conversely, the participants that attended Success Community College, where the BMI has no dedicated physical space on campus, mentioned several times how much they wanted a space on campus to go to and study, get help from BMI staff, and to socialize with the "brotherhood."

Finally, they shared how the BMI programs, events, and activities significantly contributed to their success. Their responses confirmed that the faculty mixers and social and cultural events that brought them together with their peers were valuable and fostered connections that supported their success. These experiences allowed them to develop new friendships and to feel comfortable seeking faculty for academic assistance. They found the guest speakers that came to facilitate the workshops on various academic, personal, cultural, and socio-political topics to be inspiring and uplifting. They commented on how invigorating and empowering it was to see men that looked like them, had similar backgrounds, and demonstrated a commitment to uplifting the young generation. In Zirkel's (2002) study on the protective effects of role models, students with a role model, and particularly a role model matched on race and gender, performed better academically than those with no role model. Racial and gender match, being of particular importance, raises unique concerns for African American males. The gender-role socialization perspective predicts that because fathers are especially important role models for sons, males suffer more (e.g., poor educational outcomes) from father absence (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). Therefore, when considering the frequent absence of fathers from African American families, a lack of other African American males as role models may be especially detrimental for African American males.

Off-campus retreats are another component of the BMIs to which participants made fond references. Both of the BMIs under investigation in this study took students on an off-campus retreat each year. This was an opportunity for these men to come together and focus on Black male identity and success through conversations, discussions, activities, and events. The men in this study recalled how excited they were

to go on these excursions and bond with their peers and mentors in a safe and affirming space.

Sub Question 3. What factors beyond the Black male initiative influenced their success? This question was designed to understand what factors outside of the BMI the participants found to be instrumental to their success as students. While BMI programs provide supportive staff and mentors, skill-building workshops, and foster strong campus connections, there are often programs, departments, and other initiatives that are available and designed to support student success independent of and in conjunction with BMI programs. The data answering this question fell largely within Wood and Harris's (2014) institutional domain. The institutional domain includes institutional structures and other characteristics that shape the ways in which men of color succeed in community colleges (Wood & Harris, 2014).

Institutions have the critical responsibility of being proactive about success for men of color. To this end, they must design and implement effective programs, policies, practices, and services that meet students' needs and leverage the assets of this student population. From Wood and Harris's (2012) review of the published scholarship, they observed that institution type, student services, and faculty support were prominently discussed as important institutional factors in the success of men of color in the community college. Regarding institutional type, the participants in this study were pleased with their choice to attend a community college and felt that it was a smart place to start their postsecondary educational journey. They made positive references to the services and programs provided at their community college and they drew contrasts with their experiences at the four-year institution. They reported several important institutional

elements of their community college and the BMI that fostered positive educational outcomes, such as faculty support, mandatory tutoring and advising, priority registration opportunities, student activities offerings, and other student services available on campus.

When participants were asked about the campus and campus resources, they shared an appreciation for the diversity and small classroom sizes characteristic of the community college they attended. They felt that the diverse campuses allowed them to interact with peers of various backgrounds, ethnicities, and interests, which now helps them communicate better and develop stronger interpersonal relationships. Existing research posits that diversity also appears to be positively associated with retention rates and degree aspirations (Chang, 1999), more frequent involvement in community service (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Gurin, 1999), and increased levels of civic engagement, cultural awareness, and commitment to improving racial understanding (Milem, 1994). Finally, these experiences seem to favorably influence overall satisfaction with their college experience and perceptions of the campus climate (Astin, 1993; Chang, 1999, 2001; Milem & Hakuta, 2000).

Several of the participants were employed on campus and mentioned how it removed transportation barriers, provided flexible schedules, developed professional skills, allowed them to spend more time and get involved on campus, and afforded them the opportunity to develop relationships with faculty and staff. They noted that these relationships helped them to have a network of supportive, trusted adults that could provide guidance and mentorship in the academic arena. They further shared how these faculty and staff relationships not only helped them to navigate successfully through their community college experience but also provided another source of accountability.

Important to note is that the participants felt that the faculty and staff held high expectations for them once they knew they were a part of the BMI program, which served as another source of encouragement to do well academically and personally.

The environmental domain of Wood and Harris's conceptual framework includes factors situated outside of the campus context that have a direct influence on men of color's engagement and success in community colleges (2014). These are factors that can pull students' time and attention away from their academic pursuits. Some of these factors are off-campus employment, family responsibilities, and challenges related to poverty or financial need (Wood & Harris, 2014). The design of the interview protocol for this study did not elicit many responses that initiated discussions about factors outside of the campus context; however, participants largely mentioned family as supportive and as their inspiration for completing their degree and not as a conflict to their academic pursuits. Participants described having a job, whether on campus or off campus helped them to realize the importance of work and completing a degree in order not to have to remain in hourly wage employment. This is contrary to Wood and Harris's (2014) finding that off-campus employment hindered academic pursuits. In fact, alternatively, one study stated that "research supports that the retention and success of students are linked to meaningful involvements while in school. Work experience, on or off campus, ranks as one of the most common productive involvements for all college students" (Bazin & Brooks, 1981, p. 25).

Finally, some participants that attended the inner-city, urban community college [Graduation Community College] noted the challenges that existed in their neighborhoods but did not note them as having a negative influence. Instead, they noted

their family members and neighborhoods as inspiration to complete their degree and commit to continuous personal and academic achievement. Family involvement throughout the student's life and constant support during higher education increase the chances of persistence and graduation (Guiffrida, 2004; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002). Study participants noted that family members served as external motivation by providing encouragement and support. These results support Howard's (2014) observation that the motivation, relationships, and support that Black males derive from their families should not be overlooked as instrumental factors to their academic success in college.

Reflection on Conceptual Framework

Wood and Harris's (2014) five domains provide a conceptual framework for identifying and examining factors that influence success for Black men attending community colleges. Wood and Harris (2014) posited that student success outcomes are shaped by interactions between pre-college considerations occurring prior to men of color's (MOC) matriculation to community college and five interrelated domains that manifest prominently during MOC's enrollment into community college: the academic domain, the environmental domain, the noncognitive domain, the institutional domain, and the social domain (Wood & Harris, 2014, p. 175). The questions posed to the participants in this study were designed to investigate the presence and interrelation of these domains and the subsequent impact on their success.

Wood and Harris (2014) later developed the Socio Ecological Outcomes Model (SEO model), which emerged from The Five Domains: A Conceptual Model of Black Male Success in Community Colleges (2014). The original five domains model was

based on their review and synthesis of relevant research on the experiences of Black men in postsecondary education, attending community colleges; however, the SEO model was field tested and empirically grounded by initial findings from the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM). This latter model introduced the campus ethos domain, which includes institutional structures, policies, practices, programs, and resources that are available to facilitate student success for men of color. Several findings in the current study speak to the campus ethos of the community colleges attended by the participants. For example, the campus ethos domain looks at connectedness and student validation from faculty and staff, two elements not previously included in the institutional domain of the Five Domains Model, yet referenced by participants as being integral to their success. The inputs and outputs design and empirical grounding of SEO model allows for a more accurate illustration of the interrelated variables germane to student success for men of color attending community colleges.

Within their framework, Wood and Harris (2014) discuss "precollege considerations." For each participant, reflecting on such considerations revealed factors and experiences that influenced their success. In this study, several participants mentioned that their reasons for attending college and striving to succeed were due to goals that they set as a result of the admonition and support of former teachers, parents, and family members to pursue postsecondary education. In some cases, these goals had been set as a result of these men seeing people in their communities who are not doing well and those who have experienced the type of success that these men long to achieve.

The academic domain encompasses variables that are directly related to students' academic experiences and, as a result, shape academic outcomes in community colleges.

In this study, there were several factors reported that positively impacted the academic success for the participants. The BMI encouraged them to attend class regularly, encouraged full-time enrollment, and provided the exploration and advising for selecting a major of study. The BMI fostered academic integration, and thereby academic success, by requiring tutoring, progress reporting, and creating experiences where Black males could interact with academic faculty.

In this study, working off campus and family responsibilities, variables situated in the environmental domain, were not described as a hindrance to success for these men. Instead, contrary to what Wood and Harris (2014) purport, environmental factors appeared to be a catalyst for these young men's academic and personal success goals.

This conceptual framework also considers factors situated outside of the campus context that have a direct influence on men of color's engagement and success in community colleges. Wood and Harris (2014) situate these factors within the noncognitive domain. The participants in this study describe the BMI as fostering a sense of pride in being a Black man and helped them to develop and fine tune their identity and confidence as successful Black men, having positive impact on their self-efficacy.

Participants' responses overwhelmingly reinforced the importance of institutional structures and other characteristics when it comes to the success of men of color attending community colleges. In this study, participants referenced the support services and faculty support that they experienced while attending community college. The BMI was cited as the paramount source of support and guidance as it fostered faculty interaction and facilitated access to a plethora of support services on their respective campuses.

The participants recalled being connected socially on campus. They felt as if the BMI gave them a reason to remain on campus and get involved in the activities of the BMI and other student activities on campus. Within the conceptual framework, these connections and interactions are part of the social domain. For many of them, it was their connection with other students that made them aware of the BMI and facilitated joining the program. In particular, one student mentioned how his participation in intramural sports allowed him to interact with BMI members and it was through their sharing and encouragement that made them want to find out more about the BMI and ultimately become a member. Participants' narratives suggest the support for positive social integration. However, this finding contrast the research literature, which posits that social integration for Black males is academically counterproductive. In the Bush & Bush (2010) study examining the achievement of African American men, the focus group participants describe peer interactions with other African American men as having a negative impact on their ability to succeed academically. They perceived African American males as "hanging out" and engaged in dialogue on issues irrelevant to school (Bush & Bush, 2010). While those men may have appeared to be socially integrated on campus, they were evaluated as not having a substantive connection or engagement with the college. The participants offered the suggestion for colleges to create mechanisms by which these men could have positive interactions with each other, much like the interactions that are characteristic of BMIs and other support groups relevant to the unique issues and challenges faced by African American men (Bush & Bush, 2010). The men in this study recognized intramural sports, clubs, groups, and the BMI on campus as

spaces for them to engage in positive social interaction relevant and supportive of their academic pursuit.

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Research

The findings of this study confirm and build on previous BMI research in several ways. With the exception of a few studies (e.g., Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2016, 2017, 2018; Brooms et al., 2015; Zell, 2011), researchers have not explored how Black males experience and make meaning of their engagement in Black Male Initiative programs, specifically at community colleges. Furthermore, this investigation used Wood and Harris's (2014) domains for student success for men of color in community colleges as a conceptual framework for investigating the potential and possibilities of community colleges and these programs for fostering Black male success. Given the proliferation of BMI-type programs at various higher education institutions over the past decade, it is critical to explore the experiences of these men, produce empirical data, and adjust practice as necessary.

The findings of this study have significant implications for policy, practice, and future research. The goal of this study is to provide deep insight into the experiences of Black men that attend community colleges and how they make meaning of their membership in BMIs. Specifically, the researcher wanted to know what dimensions of the BMI these community college graduates found to be most instrumental to their success. The findings from this study can be used to inform BMI program design, institutional policies, and the type and level of resources allocated to support the academic success of Black college men.

The findings underscore the importance of the BMI's efforts at providing Black male students with holistic support. According to the participants' responses during interviews, both BMIs functioned much like a "village" (Palmer & Gasman, 2008) and uncovered a plethora of possibilities for enhancing students' psychosocial and emotional development. BMI staff were essential in supporting the men's college efforts while serving as mentors, role models, and in some cases parental figures. These men found the BMIs provided a supportive and caring environment where programming was laser focused on their holistic development as scholars and Black men. Building community on campus can help students overcome hostile campus climates and provide them with a culturally enriching space on campus (Yosso et al., 2009). Connections as strong as family means a level of trust exists. Institutions can take advantage of this trust by funneling recommendations, requirements, and admonition through the BMI. Through BMI's, institutions have an established group of trusted individuals that can assist with upholding the mission. Finally, homosexual men of color often exist or operate on the fringes in academic and in mainstream social environments, however the BMI established a safe space for all students, regardless of sexual orientation, which can help to retain LGBTQ students.

The data indicate that it is important for BMIs to include some type of forum for in-depth, large group discussions on topics relevant to the Black college men on a regular basis. The participants found these discussions to be quite valuable and one of the activities that they looked forward to attending. They coveted the opportunity to have moderated discussions about current events or issues plaguing men of color. This study further revealed that conversations between and about Black males supported their socio-

emotional needs as well as deepened their sense of connection with peers and self-identity. Moreover, heightened focus on Black male identities can empower Black males by affirming their value in themselves and as a group (Brooms, 2016, 2017, 2018; Dancy, 2012; Davis, 2012). Even further, it is important for students to also develop the topics of discussion, as participants strongly suggested that BMI program leaders be sure to seek input from students when selecting topics of discussion in order for the topics to remain germane to their needs and experiences. Based upon the findings, it is also recommended that BMIs include an off-campus retreat experience in a non-academic environment. For many participants, the retreats were the highlight of their BMI experience as they found it critical to deepening the bond of brotherhood. They were able to temporarily leave behind the usual distractions students face long enough to allow for relaxation and change to occur.

Community college BMI program leaders may find it beneficial to go to local high schools to share information with boys of color about the benefits of membership in the BMI and how to get involved when they become community college students. Several of the graduates of Graduation Community College referenced knowing about the BMI before they arrived on campus because the BMI staff had come to their high school. This allowed them to establish an early connection. In some cases, before classes started, as the BMI assisted some through the orientation and course advising process before the start of their first semester. There was a common feeling of regret from participants that did not join the BMI until later in their community college experience because they soon realized that any time spent in college without the BMIs guidance, support, and brotherhood, was too long.

Participants in this study were asked if females should be included in BMIs. At some institutions, females have joined and participate regularly in these majority male groups. The data from this study provides overwhelming evidence for BMIs maintaining a single-gender focus. The men in this study unanimously share feeling safe to share their thoughts, feelings and emotions in a space with their male peers. They all noted that they would not enjoy the same freedom and comfort to openly share and be transparent if there were females in the group since many of the activities and discussions evoked honest and deep sharing, which sometimes included shedding tears. This should be considered by institutions when developing programs and planning activities designed to support Black men.

Participants' responses revealed the importance of having a place on campus to go and spend time with other Black male students and staff members. To this end, BMIs should have dedicated space for activities, events, and where Black males can interact with their peers and receive academic and personal support. The BMI at Graduation Community College has dedicated physical spaces. They have administrative offices, a multi-purpose room, and a classroom for tutoring and other academic activities. The research participants that attended this community college appreciated having this space as it was described by some as a "home away from home" where they could go and feel safe, supported, and spend time with their BMI family. They knew that they could always go there and receive support in a welcoming and affirming atmosphere. Conversely, the participants that attended Success Community College, where the BMI has no dedicated physical space on campus, mentioned several times how much they wanted a space on campus to go to and get help from BMI staff and to socialize with their peers. Having

such a space may encourage students to stay on campus longer, which can increase engagement and involvement on campus, thereby fostering persistence. It can also serve as a hub for students to come and get questions answered, tutoring, advising, and counseling. Community colleges serve students who juggle school, work, family care commitments, and attend part-time at higher percentages than four-year institutions, preventing them from being on campus enough for engagement to occur spontaneously. Community colleges, therefore, must be deliberate and aggressively create opportunities to involve students in campus life (McClenney, Marti, & Adkins, 2007).

Finally, the finding that supporting Black male success as a central component of BMIs both confirms and adds to extant research. Institutional efforts to support Black male retention, persistence, and completion abound in the literature regarding the needs of Black males in college (e.g., Brooms, 2017; Brooms et al., 2015; Brown, 2012; Cuyjet, 2006; Jackson, 2012; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Palmer et al., 2014; Wood, 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2015; Wood & Williams, 2013); however, lesser investigated is how students describe, make meaning of, and benefit from BMI support and services. In this study, students suggested that the BMI program was at the center of their success and their college experience. Participants particularly noted feeling cared for and having positive interactions with BMI program staff. In particular, they received a great deal of attention and holistic support not only from the BMI staff but also from faculty and staff at the community college who knew that they were members of the BMI. Additionally, students identified various ways that they benefited personally, such as learning more about manhood, help-seeking, and how to succeed in academic settings. Their personal growth

and development were important components of their persistence toward graduation and success beyond community college.

It can be argued that the predominant philosophy in higher education places the onus of student success on the student only, instead of thinking about student success as institutional commitment to equity and institutional responsibility. The student focused perspective results in many ad hoc compensatory programs to essentially get students to fit into the norm (Bensimon, 2007). Equity-mindedness is a way of approaching educational reform that foregrounds the policies and practices contributing to disparities in educational achievement and abstains from blaming students for those accumulated disparities (Bensimon 2007; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Equity-mindedness can transform institutions into places that look and feel like the spaces and places that BMIs provide Black males without the experiences or the resources being relegated to an ad hoc program or support group. The findings from this research underscore the importance for institutions that are willing to assume responsibility for the elimination of inequitable outcomes. Rather than viewing inequalities as a natural catastrophe (Coates, 2015), equity-minded individuals allow for the possibility that inequalities might be created or exacerbated by taken-for-granted practices and policies, inadequate knowledge, a lack of cultural know-how, or the absence of intuitional support; all of which can be changed. Thus, it is imperative for institutions to develop equity-minded thinking and adopt equity-minded practices. Our institutions talk a lot about underprepared students, but often fail to engage in discourse about the underprepared faculty. As the landscape of higher education becomes more and more diverse, it is important for faculty and institutions at large to prepare themselves to best serve their diverse populations.

This research study was done using participants who are graduates and had to reflect on their previous community college experiences. Additional research is recommended to investigate the experiences of current community college students who are members of BMIs. It would be valuable to see if the findings of a study investigating experiences of current students are similar or differ from this study. Consumers of this research must consider factors of maturation and the ability to make deep connections that develops with age, having an impact on the ways in which Black males make meaning of their community college BMI experiences and identify components of the program that they find most impactful. Research gaps may also be filled by conducting this study using research sites/BMIs located in rural, urban, and suburban areas to see if these geographical differences have an impact on the needs of Black male students and overall findings.

Finally, the use of focus groups and field observations in addition to semi-structured interviews could be valuable in gleaning a complete picture of the experiences of Black men in community college BMIs. Future research may also find it beneficial to employ a mixed method design where GPAs or other academic measures are investigated and compared based upon membership or non-membership in a BMI or other retention, mentoring, or student support program. This research provides insight into the relationship that BMIs may have with quantitative measures of student success for Black males.

Conclusion

Community colleges in the United States serve as a gateway into post-secondary education and career readiness for many Black males with nearly 50% of African American males enrolling in community colleges to earn either an associate's degree, certification, or certificate (Toldson & Morton, 2011). However, there is a significant gap among the percentage of Black males who persist and actually earn a degree in comparison to other groups of students (LaVant et al., 1997). Many support services and initiatives such as BMIs have been implemented to promote success for Black male students, there is still much more work to be done in order to increase the graduation rates for these men. Mason (1998) posits that Black male students often arrive at colleges confused, intimidated, and feeling isolated. Therefore, upon arriving to campus, many Black males face extreme challenges as they attempt to adjust a different and unfamiliar environment (Cuyjet, 1997). The success of Black men can improve if community colleges take an institutional approach to addressing these concerns and providing necessary supports. BMIs can be a way of addressing this issue because they provide a structured support system that enables them to experience success both academically and personally, thereby increasing persistence and graduation rates.

The current study and other research studies on this topic should remind institutions that Black men need a nurturing and supportive environment to scaffold their long-term success (LaVant et al., 1997). There are also certain components and dimensions of BMIs, identified in the findings of this study, that are essential to Black male student success. BMIs can enhance career and professional development, self-esteem, academic and social skills, and increase the likelihood of Black men earning a

college degree. As evident in the current study, BMIs can also increase the likelihood that Black male students will successfully transfer to four-year universities. Furthermore, the establishment of such programs can provide Black men with the skills, tools, and resources for productive citizenship and personal success. Without a college degree, career choices and possibilities for success are extremely limited (Cuyjet, 1997). BMIs can serve as vehicles for improving graduation rates, career readiness, and the overall socio-economic environment for the United States as they produce men equipped to become gainfully employed and contributing members of society.

References

Allen, W. R., & Epps, E. G. (1991). *College in Black and White: African American students in predominantly White and in historically Black public universities*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Allen, W. R. (1986). *Gender and campus race differences in Black student academic performance, racial attitudes and college satisfaction*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Education Foundation.

Allen, W. R. (1992). The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review*, *62*(1), 26-44.

Astin, A. W. (1968). *The college environment.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Astin, A. W. (1975). *Preventing students from dropping out*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. (1985). *Achieving educational excellence*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W. (1993). An empirical typology of college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, *34*(1), 36–46.

Barker, M. J., & Avery, J. C. (2012). The impact of an institutional Black male leadership initiative on engagement and persistence. *College Student Affairs Journal*, *30*(2), 73.

Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2013). Education pays. *The College Board.*

Bazin & Brooks. (1981). The work experience program: A collaborative effort between financial aids and the career planning and placement center. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, *11*(2), 5-8.

Bean & Eaton. (1995). An approach/avoidance behavioral model of college student attrition. *Research in Higher Education, 36*(6), 617-645.

Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research*, *55*(4), 485-540.

Bensimon, E. M. (2005). Closing the achievement gap in higher education: An organizational learning perspective. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *131*, 99-111.

Bensimon, E. M. (2007). The underestimated significance of practitioner knowledge in the scholarship on student success. *The Review of Higher Education*, *30*(4), 441-469.

Bogue, E. G. (1998). Quality assurance in higher education: The evolution of systems and design ideals. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 99*, 7-18.

Bonner, F. A., & Bailey, K. W. (2006). Enhancing the academic climate for African American college men. In M. J. Cuyjet (Ed.), *African American men in college* (pp. 24–46). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bowen, W. G., Bok, D., & Loury, G. C. (1998). *The shape of the river* (Vol. 4). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bragg, D., & Durham, B. (2012). Perspectives on access and equity in the era of (community) completion. *Community College Review*, *40*(2), 106–125.

Brooms, D. R. (2016). *Being Black, being male on campus: Understanding and confronting Black male collegiate experiences*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Brooms, D. R. (2017). Staying focused on the goal: Peer bonding and faculty mentors supporting Black males' persistence in college. *Journal of Black Studies*, *48*(3), 305-326.

Brooms, D. R. (2018). 'Building us up': Supporting Black male college students in a Black male initiative program. *Critical Sociology*, *44*(1), 141-155.

Brooms, D. R., Goodman, J., & Clark, J. (2015). " We need more of this": Engaging Black men on college campuses. *College Student Affairs Journal*, *33*(1), 105-123.

Brown, A. L. (2011). "Same old stories": The Black male in social science and educational literature, 1930s to the present. *Teachers College Record*, 113(9), 2047-2079.

Brown, T. D. (2007). Keeping the brothers focused: A study of the impact of male mentoring on the community college level (Doctoral dissertation). Capella University, Minneapolis, MN.

Buchmann, C., & DiPrete, T. A. (2006). The growing female advantage in college completion: The role of family background and academic achievement. *American Sociological Review*, *71*(4), 515-541.

Bush, E. C. (2004). Dying on the vine: A look at African American student achievement in California community colleges (Doctoral dissertation). The Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA.

Bush & Bush. (2005). Bush, E. C., & Bush, L. (2005). Black male achievement and the community college. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, *22*(2), 44.

Bush, E. C., & Bush, L. V. (2010). Calling out the elephant: An examination of African American male achievement in community colleges. *Journal of African American Males in Education, 1*(1), 40-62.

Chambliss, C. (2003). *Making departments distinctive: The continuous quality improvement (CQI) mindset*. Collegeville, PA: Educational Resources Information Center.

Chang, M. J. (1999). Does racial diversity matter? The educational impact of a racially diverse undergraduate population. *Journal of College Student Development*, *40*(4), 377–395.

Chang, M. J. (2001). The positive educational effects of racial diversity on campus. In G. Orfield & M. Kurlaender (Eds.), *Diversity challenged: Evidence on the impact of affirmative action* (pp. 175–186). Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University.

Chenoweth, K. (1999). HBCUs tackle the knotty problem of retention. *Black Issues in Higher Education, 15*(26), 38-41.

Choy, S. (2002). Nontraditional Undergraduates: Findings from the Condition of Education 2002. NCES 2002-012. National Center for Education Statistics.

Collins, J. D., Suarez, C. E., Beatty, C. C., & Rosch, D. M. (2017). Fostering leadership capacity among Black male achievers: Findings from an identity-based leadership immersion program. *Journal of Leadership Education, 16*(3), 82-96.

Consortium for Student Data Exchange. (2004). Consortium for Student Data Exchange. Annual Report. 2004). http://www.occe.ou.edu/csrde/

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). Strategies for qualitative data analysis. Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory, 3.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Cross, T., & Slater, R. B. (2000). The alarming decline in the academic performance of African-American men. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 27*, 82-87.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cuyjet , M. J. (1994). African American men on college campuses: Their needs and their perceptions. *New Directions for Student Services, 80*, 5-16.

Cuyjet, M. J. (1997). African-American men on college campuses: Their needs and their perceptions. In M. J. Cuyjet (Ed.), *Helping African-American men succeed in college*, (New Directions for Student Services, No. 80, pp. 5-16). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Cuyjet , M. J. (2006). *Helping African American men succeed in college.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dancy II, T. E. (2012). *The brother code: Manhood and masculinity among African American men in college*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Dancy II, T. E., & Brown, M. C. (2012). *African American males and education: Researching the convergence of race and identity*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Davis, J. (2012). *The first-generation student experience: Implications for campus practice, and strategies for improving persistence and success*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Davis, J. E. (1999). What does gender have to do with the experience of African American college men. In V. C. Polite & J. E. Davis (Eds.), *African American males in school and society: Practices and policies for effective education* (pp. 134-148). New York, NY: Teacher College Press.

Davis, L., (Ed.). (1999). *Working with African American males: A guide to practice.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bernal, D. D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *8*(1), 105-126.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (2001). *The power of community: Mobilizing for family and schooling*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Dillman, D. A. (2008): The logic and psychology of constructing questionnaires. In E. D. de Leeuw, J. J. Hox, and D. A. Dillman (Eds.), *International handbook of survey methodology* (pp. 551-554). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Donnor, J. K., & Brown, A. L. (2011). *The education of Black males in a 'post-racial' world*. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.

Druery, J. E., & Brooms, D. R. (2018). "It lit up the campus": Engaging Black males in culturally enriching environments. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *12*(4), 330–340.

Esters, L. L., & Mosby, D. C. (2007). Disappearing acts: The vanishing Black male on community college campuses. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, *24*(14), 45.

Flowers, L. A. (2006). Effects of attending a 2-year institution on African American males' academic and social integration in the first year of college. *Teachers College Record*, *108*(2), 267.

Ford, D., & Moore, J. (2013). Understanding and reversing underachievement, low achievement, and achievement gaps among high-ability African American males in urban school contexts (Report). *The Urban Review*, *45*(4), 399-415.

Fortson, S. B. (1994). *Evaluation of a program designed to influence academic self-concept and racial identity among African American male college students* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.

Fortson, S. B. (1997). An evaluation of a program to influence academic self-concept among African American male college students. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *34*(3), 104-107.

Freeman, T. and Huggans, M. (2009). Persistence of African-American male community college students in engineering. H. Frierson, W. Pearson, and J. Wyche (Eds.), *Black American males in higher education: Diminishing Proportions* (*Diversity in Higher Education* (Vol. 6, pp. 229-251). Bingley, State: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Gardenshire-Crooks, A., Collado, H., Martin, K., & Castro, A. (2010). *Terms of engagement: Men of Color discuss their experiences in community college*. New York, NY: MDRC

Glenn, F. S. (2003). The retention of Black male students in Texas public community colleges. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *5*(2), 115-133.

Grant-Thompson, S. K., & Atkinson, D. R. (1997). Cross-cultural mentor effectiveness and African American male students. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *23*(2), 120-134.

Guiffrida, D. A. (2004). How involvement in African American student organizations supports and hinders academic achievement. *NACADA Journal*, *24*(1-2), 88-98.

Gurin, P. (1999). Expert report of Patricia Gurin. *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, *5*(1), 363-425.

Hagedorn, L. S., Maxwell, W., & Hampton, P. (2001). Correlates of retention for African-American males in community colleges. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *3*(3), 243-263.

Harleston, S. M. (2005). Retention strategies employed by faculty and administrators of music programs at historically Black colleges and universities, and the effectiveness of these strategies in retaining music majors. (Doctoral dissertation). Wilmington College, Wilmington, DE.

Harper, S. (2005). Inside the experiences of high-achieving African American male students. *About Campus: Enriching the Student Learning Experience, 10*(1), 8-15.

Harper, S. R. (2009). Niggers no more: A critical race counternarrative on Black male student achievement at predominantly White colleges and universities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22*(6), 697-712.

Harper, S. R. (2010). An anti-deficit achievement framework for research on students of color in STEM. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 148*, 63-74.

Harper, S. R. (2012). *Black male student success in higher education: A report from the national Black male college achievement study*. Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.

Harper, S. R., Carini, R. M., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2004). Gender differences in student engagement among African American undergraduates at historically Black colleges and universities. *Journal of College Student Development, 45*(3), 271-284.

Harper, S. R., & Davis III, C. H. (2012). They (don't) care about education: A counternarrative on Black male students' responses to inequitable schooling. *Educational Foundations, 26*, 103-120.

Harper, S., & Kuykendall, J. (2012). Institutional efforts to improve Black student achievement: A standards-based approach. *Change, 44*(2), 23-29.

Harris, F., III (2010). College men's meanings of masculinities and contextual influences: Toward a conceptual model. *Journal of College Student Development 51*(3), 297-318.

Harris, F. & Wood, L. (2013). Student success for men of color in community colleges: A review of published literature and research, 1998 – 2012. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 6*(3), 174-185.

Harris, F. & Wood, J. L. (2016). *Advancing success for men of color in community colleges*. Minority Male Community College Collaborative. San Diego, CA: Printing Office.

Harris, W. G. (1996). African-American males in higher education: Reframing the issue. *Black Issues in Higher Education, 13*(16), 92.

Harvey, W. B. (2002). African American males in higher education. *The Black Male in White America* (pp. 13-36). New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Hermanowiz, J. C. (2004). The college departure process among the academic elite. *Education and Urban Society, 37*(12), 74-93.

Hilton, A., Lewis, C., & Wood, J. (2012). *Black males in postsecondary education: Examining their experiences in diverse institutional contexts*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Holly, H. H., & Kenny, M. (2002). Attachment, social support, and college adjustment among Black students at predominantly White universities. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*(3), 327.

Hopkins, R. (1997). *Educating Black males: Critical lessons in schooling, community, and power.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Howard, T. (2008). Who really cares? The disenfranchisement of African American males in preK-12 schools: A critical race theory perspective. *Teachers College Record*, *110*(5), 954–985.

Howard, T. C. (2014). *Black male (d): Peril and promise in the education of African American males*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Howard, T., Flennaugh, T., & Terry, C. (2012). Black males, social imagery, and the disruption of pathological identities: Implications for research and teaching. *Educational Foundations*, *26*(1-2), 85–102.

Hudson, Sr., W. E., Henderson, D., & Henderson, J. (2002). The retention of entering and returning freshmen enrolled at Florida A&M University's school of general studies during the fall semesters 1997-2001. *Education, 123*(1), 210-214.

Hurd, H. (2000). Staying power: Colleges work to improve retention rates. *Black Issues in Higher Education, 17*(18), 42-46.

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of education*, 70(4), 324-345.

Jackson, B. A. (2012). Bonds of brotherhood: Emotional and social support among college Black men. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *642*(1), 61-71.

Jackson, J., & Moore, J. (2006). African American males in education: Endangered or ignored? *Teachers College Record, 108*(2), 201–205.

Jacoby, B., & Garland, J. (2004). Strategies for enhancing commuter student success. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *6*(1), 61-79.

Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education*, *118*(2), 282.

Jones-Giles, J. (2004). Current and future institutional practices and policies established to address student retention at selected historically Black colleges and universities (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (Accession No. 305188011).

Jordan, P. G. (2008). *African American male students' success in an urban community college: A case study*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.

Kaye, M., & Anderson, R. (1999). Continuous improvement: The ten essential criteria. *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*, *16*(5), 485-509.

Kena, G., Hussar, W., McFarland, J., De Brey, C., Musu-Gillette, L., Wang, X., ... & Barmer, A. (2016). The Condition of Education 2016. NCES 2016-144. National Center for Education Statistics.

Kim, E., & Hargrove, D. T. (2013). Deficient or resilient: A critical review of Black male academic success and persistence in higher education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *82*(3), 300-311.

Lamborn, S. D., & Nguyen, D. G. T. (2004). African American adolescents' perceptions of family interactions: Kinship support, parent–child relationships, and teen adjustment. *Journal of youth and Adolescence*, *33*(6), 547-558.

Latiker, T. T. (2003). A qualitative study of African American student persistence in a private Black college (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (Accession No. 62168333).

LaVant, B. D., Anderson, J. L., & Tiggs, J. W. (1997). Retaining African American men through mentoring initiatives. *New Directions for Student Services*, *80*, 43-53.

Leveille, D. E. (2006). Accountability in higher education: A public agenda for trust and cultural change. Retrieved from Center for Studies in Higher Education website: http://www.repositories.cdlib.org/cshe/CSHE-2--26.

Lucas, Y. (2018). Support structures: Challenges and potential solutions toward persistence in earning a baccalaureate degree for Black male students attending predominantly White institutions. *The Journal of Business Diversity*, *18*(1), 68-78.

MacQueen, K. M.,Woodsong, C. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2009). *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide*. Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International.

Malcom-Piqueux, L., & Bensimon, E. M. (2017). Taking equity-minded action to close equity gaps. *Peer Review: Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence, 19*(2), 5.

Marshall, D. (2005). A qualitative study of African American Students' perceptions of retention programs at a historical Black college/university and a predominantly White institution (Doctoral dissertation). (UMI No. ATT 3193344)

Mason, H. P. (1998). A persistence model for African American male urban community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *22*(8), 751-760.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). Conceptual framework: What do you think is going on. *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*, *41*, 33-63.

Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (Vol. 41). New York, NY: Sage Publications.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*, (Vol. 41). New York, NY: Sage Publications.

McDaniel, C., & Graham, S. W. (2001). Student retention in a historically Black institution. *College Student Journal*, *35*(1), 143-158.

McGowan, B. L. (2016). Interpersonal relationships: Exploring race and relationship decisions among African American college men. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *53*(3), 243-255.

McClenney, K., Marti, C. N., & Adkins, C. (2007). Student engagement and student outcomes: Key findings from CCSSE validation research. Community College Survey of Student Engagement.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). Assessing and evaluating qualitative research. *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*, *1*, 18-36.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative case study research qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (2nd ed., pp. 39-54). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mihok, S. Y. (2005). Persistence of first-generation low-income students receiving financial aid at a public regional university (Doctoral dissertation). Johnson & Wales University, Providence, RI.

Milem, J. E. (1994). College, students, and racial understanding. *Thought and Action*, *9*(2), 51-92.

Milem, J. F., & Hakuta, K. (2000). The benefits of racial and ethnic diversity in higher education. In D. Wilds (Ed.), *Minorities in higher education 1999-2000: Seventeenth annual status report* (pp. 39-64). Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Muraskin, L., & Lee, J. (2004). Raising the graduation rates of low-income college students. Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.

Mustiful, A. M. (2005). Resistance of African American males at four year institutions [Abstract]. Available from Dissertation Abstracts International. (UMI No. ATT 3172901)

Neal, L. I., McCray, A., Webb-Johnson, G., & Bridgest, S. T. (2003). The effects of African American movement styles on teachers' perceptions and reactions. *Journal of Special Education, 37*(1), 49-57.

Nettie, L., McDill, E., & McPartland, J. (1994). Education reforms and students at risk: A review of the current state of the art. *Education Review, 34*(4), 145-162.

Nevarez, C., & Wood, J. L. (2010). *Community college leadership and administration: Theory, practice, and change* (Vol. 3). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Nora, A., & Cabrera, A. F. (1996). The role of perceptions of prejudice and discrimination on the adjustment of minority students to college. *The Journal of Higher Education, 67*(2), 119-148.

Orfield, G. (2004). *Dropouts in America: Confronting the graduation rate crisis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Orfield, G., Losen, D., Wald, J., & Swanson, C. (2004). Losing our future: How minority youths are being left behind by the graduation rate crisis [Executive Summary]. Produced by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, Advocates for Children of New York, The Civil Society Institute.

Padilla, R. (2000). *Student success modeling: Elementary school to college* (1st ed.). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Palmer, R. T., & Gasman, M. (2008). "It takes a village to raise a child": The role of social capital in promoting academic success of African American men at a Black college. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*, 52-70.

Palmer, R. T., Davis, R. J., & Maramba, D. C. (2010). Role of an HBCU in supporting academic success for underprepared Black males. *Negro Educational Review, 61*(1-4), 85–106.

Palmer, R. T., Wood, J. L., Dancy, T. E., & Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). *Black male collegians: Increasing access, retention, and persistence in higher education* (ASHE Higher Education Report No. 40). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Palmer R. & Young, E. (2008). Determined to succeed: Salient factors that foster academic success for academically unprepared Black males at a Black college. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 10*(4), 465-482.

Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (1991). *How college affects students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Paterson, B. L., Thorne, S. E., Canam, C., & Jillings, C. (2001). *Meta-study of qualitative health research: A practical guide to meta-analysis and meta-synthesis* (Vol. 3). New York, NY: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Perrakis, A. I. (2008). Factors promoting academic success among African American and White male community college students. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *142*, 15-23.

Pierce, C. (1974). Psychiatric problems of the Black minority. In S. Arieti (Ed.), *American handbook of psychiatry* (pp. 512-523). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Pierce, Chester (1989). Unity in diversity: Thirty-three years of stress. In G.L. Berry & J.K. Asainen (Eds.), *Black students: Psychosocial issues and academic achievement* (pp. 296-312). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Pierce, C. (1995). Stress analogs of racism and sexism: Terrorism, torture, and disaster. *Mental Health, Racism, and Sexism*, *33*, 277-293.

Planty, M., Hussar, W. J., & Snyder, T. D. (2009). *Condition of education 2009*. Government Printing Office.

Polite, V. C., & Davis, J. E. (Eds.). (1999). *African American males in school and society: Practices and policies for effective education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Miller, M. T., Pope, M. L., & Steinmann, T. D. (2006). Trait and behavioral differences among community college students based on gender: Results of a national study. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *30*(9), 715-728.

Rosas, M., & Hamrick, F. A. (2002). Postsecondary enrollment and academic decision making: Family influences on women college students of Mexican descent. *Equity &Excellence in Education*, *35*(1), 59-69.

Ross, M. J. (1998). *Success factors of Young African-American males at a historically Black college*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Saldana, J. (2012). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. New York, NY: Sage Publications.

Schaefer, L. (2013). Beginning teacher attrition: A question of identity making and identity shifting. *Teachers and Teaching*, *19*(3), 260-274.

Schaeffer, G., Epting, K., Zinn, T., & Buskist, W. (2003). Student and faculty perceptions of effective teaching: A successful replication. *Teaching of Psychology*, *30*(2), 133-136.

Scriven, M. (1991). Multiple-rating items (TM 018 024). Retrieved from U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Educational Resources Information Center.

Seidman, A. (2005). *College student retention: formula for student success.* Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Seymour, E. & Hewitt, N. M. (1997). *Talking about leaving: Why undergraduates leave the sciences*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Sherman, T. M., Giles, M. B., & Williams-Green, J. (1994). Assessment and retention of Black students in higher education. *The Journal of Negro Education, 63*(2), 164-180.

Smedley, B. D., Myers, H. F., & Harrell, S. P. (1993). Minority-status stresses and the college adjustment of ethnic minority freshmen. *The Journal of Higher Education, 64*(4), 434-452.

Smith Morest, V. (2013). From access to opportunity: The evolving social roles of community colleges. *The American Sociologist, 44*(4), 319–328.

Solórzano, D. G., & Villalpando, O. (1998). Critical race theory, marginality, and the experience of students of color in higher education. *Sociology of Education: Emerging perspectives, 21,* 211-222.

Spradley, P. (2001). Strategies for educating the adult Black male in college. ERIC Digest.

Stevens, C. D. (2006). Skating the zones: African-American male students at a predominantly White community college *(*Doctoral dissertation). School of Education, New York University, New York, NY.

Stokes, P. J. (2005). Hidden in sight: Adult learners forge a new tradition in higher education: A national dialogue. Retrieved from Secretary on Education Commission on the Future of Higher Education website: http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/report/stokes/pdf.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2012a). Satisfaction and retention among African American men at two-year community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 36*(5), 358-375.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2012b). Exploring the impact of Facebook and Myspace use on first-year students' sense of belonging and persistence decisions. *Journal of College Student Development, 53*(6), 783-796.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2015). Factors influencing Black males' preparation for college and success in STEM majors: A mixed methods study. *Western Journal of Black Studies, 39*(1), 45.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2017). Factors that influence the persistence and success of Black men in urban public universities. *Urban Education*, *52*(9), 1106-1128.

Swail, W., (2003). *Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education: A Framework for Success (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report).* Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Association for the Study of Higher Education, Eric Clearinghouse on Higher Education, W., & George Washington Univ.

Terenzini, P. T., & Pascarella, E. T. (1978). The relation of students' precollege characteristics and freshman year experience to voluntary attrition. *Research in Higher Education, 9*(4), 347-366.

Terenzini, P. T., & Pascarella, E. T. (1980). Toward the validation of Tinto's model of college student attrition: A review of recent studies. *Research in Higher Education, 12*(3), 271-282.

Terenzini, P. T., Pascarella, E. T., & (1995). The impact of college on students: Myths, rational myths, and some other things that may not be true. *NACADA Journal*, *15*(2), 26-33.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45*, 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1982). Limits of theory and practice in student attrition. *Journal of Higher Education, 53*, 687-700.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1998). Colleges as communities: Taking research on student persistence seriously. *The Review of Higher Education, 21*(2), 167-177.

Tinto, V. (2000). Looking at the university through different lenses. *About Campus*, *4*(6), 2-3.

Toldson, I., & Morton, J. (2011). A million reasons there're more Black men in college than in prison; Eight hundred thousand reasons there's more work to be done [Editor's comment]. *The Journal of Negro Education, 80*(1), 1-4.

Tschirhart, M., & Bielefeld, W. (2016). Program evaluation. In *Managing Nonprofit Organizations* (pp. 299–326). San Francisco, CA: Wiley & Sons.

Turner, E., & J. Bitchener. (2008). *An approach to teaching the writing of literature reviews*. Zeitschrift Schreiben: AUT University.

Vasquez Urias, M., & Wood, J. (2014). Black male graduation rates in community colleges: Do institutional characteristics make a difference? *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *38*(12), 1112–1124.

Weaver-Hightower, M. (2003). The "boy turn" in research on gender and education. *Review of Educational Research, 73*(4), 471-498.

White House. (2015). My brother's keeper taskforce report to the President.

Widoff, J. (2000). Returning male students struggle with balance. *The Bulletin, 68*(4), 29-34.

Wilkins, R. D. (2005). Swimming upstream: A study of Black males and the academic pipeline (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3244696)

Williams, R. (1997). Vampires anonymous and critical race practice. *Michigan Law Review*, 95, 741–765.

Williams, D. K. (2019). An anti-deficit approach to the study of persistence: Factors influencing persistence among Black males attending community college. *All Capstone Projects*, https://opus.govst.edu/capstones/373

Wood, J. L. (2012). Leaving the 2-year college: Predictors of Black male collegian departure. *Journal of Black Studies, 43*(3), 303-326.

Wood, J. L. (2012). From the right to fail to the right to succeed: Black males in community colleges. *About Campus*, *17*(2), 30–32.

Wood, J. L. (2013). The Same…but different: Examining background characteristics among Black males in public two-year colleges. *Journal of Negro Education, 82*(1), 47-61.

Wood, J. L. (2014). Examining academic variables affecting the persistence and attainment of Black male collegians: A focus on academic performance and integration in the two-year college. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 17*(5), 601-622.

Wood, J. L., & Essien-Wood, I. (2012). Capital identity projection: Understanding the psychosocial effects of capitalism on Black male community college students. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 33*(5), 984-995.

Wood, J. L. & Harris, III, F. (2014). The five domains: A conceptual model of Black male success in community college. In F.A. Bonner (Ed.), *Building on resilience: Models and frameworks of Black male success across the P-20 pipeline* (pp. 173-187). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Wood, J. L., & Harrison, J. D. (2014). College choice for Black males in the community college: Factors influencing institutional selection. *Negro Educational Review, 65*(1-4), 87-97.

Wood, J. L., Hilton, A. A., & Lewis, C. (2011). Black male collegians in public two-year colleges: Student perspectives on the effect of employment on academic success. *National Association of Student Affairs Professionals Journal*, *14*(1), 97-110.

Wood, J. L. & Palmer, R. T.,(2012). *Black men in college: Implications for HBCUs and beyond*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Wood, J. L., & Palmer, R. T. (2013). Understanding the personal goals of Black male community college students: Facilitating academic and psychosocial development. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*(2), 222-241.

Wood, J. L. & Palmer, R. T. (2015). *Black men in higher education: A guide to ensuring student success*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Wood, J. L. & Williams, R. C. (2013). Persistence factors for Black males in the community college: An examination of background, academic, social, and environmental variables. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men, 1*(2), 1-28.

Yosso, T., Smith, W., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review*, *79*(4), 659-691.

Zell, M. (2011). I am my brother's keeper: The impact of a brother2brother program on African American men in college. *Journal of African American Males in Education, 2*(2), 214-233.

Zirkel, S. (2002). Is there a place for me? Role models and academic identity among White students and students of color. *Teachers College Record*, *104*(2), 357-376.

Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation Email

Dear (Participant Name),

My name is Richmond Hill and I am a graduate student in the Higher Education Administration program in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at The George Washington University. I am conducting a research project and I would like your help.

My research project is about the experiences of Black men who graduated from community colleges and were members of a Black male initiative (BMI). As someone who may fit these criteria, I would like the opportunity to speak with you about your experiences.

The interview should not take more than 1 hour and your responses will be kept confidential. Your participation in the interview is completely voluntary and you can opt-out at any time. Upon completion of the interview, I can offer you a $10 Starbucks gift card in appreciation for your participation.

Please respond to this email within seven days to let me know whether or not you are willing to participate. Feel free to forward this message to other men you know who might have also graduated from a community college and participated in a BMI.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Richmond Hill

Appendix B: Follow-Up Email

Dear (Participant Name),

My name is Richmond Hill and I am a graduate student in the Higher Education Administration program in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at The George Washington University. I emailed you about a week ago to ask for your help completing a research project.

I would still like your help with the study that I am conducting about the experiences of Black men who graduated from community colleges and were members of a Black male initiative (BMI). As someone who [may fit] these criteria, I would like the opportunity to speak with you about your experiences. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Your participation in the interview is completely voluntary and you can opt-out at any time. Upon completion of the interview, I can offer you a $10 Starbucks gift card in appreciation for your participation.

Please respond to this email within seven days to let me know whether or not you are willing to participate. Feel free to forward this message to other men you know who might have also graduated from a community college and participated in a minority male support program.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Richmond Hill

Appendix C: Participant Eligibility Questionnaire Email

Dear (Participant Name),

Thank you for your interest in the community college Black male initiative study. Research studies require that all participants meet certain pre-determined criteria. Please use the link below that will take you to a brief questionnaire that I will use to determine if you will be able to participate in this study. Please complete this questionnaire within 5 business days of receipt. Thanks again for your interest. Your time and responses are appreciated.

Sincerely,

Richmond Hill

Appendix D: Study Introduction and Screening Questionnaire

You are about to participate in a confidential screening questionnaire for a dissertation research study, conducted by Richmond Hill, for partial fulfillment of his Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration at The George Washington University, Washington, DC.

Participation in this screening questionnaire does not bind you to participation in this study, but informs the researcher, Richmond Hill, of your interest in participation and your eligibility for participation in this study. Should your answers make you eligible for further participation, Richmond Hill will contact you and guide you through the next phases of the research.

This research is designed to gather information from each participant about their experiences as Black males attending a community college and participating in a Black male initiative (BMI). The purpose of this study is to gain a deep understanding of student experiences as members of a BMI, simultaneously promoting an awareness of Black male student success at the community college. This study will produce data that can be used to inform institutional policy and commitment, resource allocation, and program development for initiatives designed to support student success for Black men.

Should you be selected for this study, you will be one of approximately 12-18 people confidentially interviewed for this research, receiving minimal compensation for their time.

[Please answer the questions below.]

1) What is your age?

2) What is your gender?
3) What is your race/ethnicity?
4) Did you graduate from a community college with an associate's degree?
5) If so, when did you graduate?
6) Were you a member/did you participate in a minority male initiative/support program during your time as a community college student?
7) How long (semesters, weeks, years) were you a member/did you participate in the program?
8) Do you feel that you will have the time to participate in a 60-75 minute interview and a brief follow-up interview if necessary?

Appendix E: Letter to Ineligible Invitees

Dear (Participant Name),

Thank you for your interest in my study and thank you for taking the time to complete the eligibility questionnaire. Research studies require all participants to meet certain criteria. Unfortunately, you do not meet one or more of the criteria necessary to be eligible to participate in this study. Again, thank you for your willingness to participate.

Sincerely,

Richmond Hill

Appendix F: Interview Reminder Email

Dear _____ ,

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me to talk about your experiences as a Black male community college graduate who participated in a Black Male Initiative (BMI). This is a reminder that we have scheduled our meeting for the following date, time, and location:

[Insert date, time, location]

If you have any questions or concerns before the interview, please contact me via email at richmondhill@gwu.edu. You can also call or text me at 703-725-2190. I look forward to meeting you soon.

Thank you,

Richmond Hill

Appendix G: Interview Protocol

Thank you for allowing me to interview you about your experience as a community college graduate. This study seeks to understand the experiences of Black male achievers and former members of a community college (BMI). Understanding and publishing the experiences of these students will help administrators, program coordinators, and other decision makers adopt policies and processes that will enable Black male students to succeed in college. The intent is to gain a deep understanding of student experiences as members of a minority male support program, simultaneously promoting an awareness of Black male achievement at the community college.

The experiences that you will be asked to recall will have occurred while you were still attending community college. The questions that will be asked during this interview are strategically structured to encourage you to reflect upon your recent experiences as a Black male who participated in a BMI while attending community college.

This interview will last approximately 75 minutes, and may require a follow-up. Your participation in this interview is voluntary and you can opt-out of the interview at any time. Your identity will be kept anonymous. Do you have any questions? Is it okay if I record this interview so that I can make sure I have an accurate record of what we discussed?

Thank you. Let's begin.

1) What was your primary reason for attending college?
2) Please describe in your own words your experiences at the community college?

Probe: Now you told me about your broad experiences, can you also tell me about your experiences socially, spiritually, and culturally?

3) What factors would you say contributed to your academic success while attending community college.

   Probe: Did you experience any academic challenges? If so, how did you deal with them?

   Probe: Reflecting upon your experiences and what you've just shared, are there any other factors that aided your success that you'd like to share with me?

4) How would you describe your relationship with faculty members on your campus?

   Probe: Did you notice any changes in your relationships with faculty members during your time as a student. Did they strengthen, weaken, etc.? If so, how?

5) How would you describe your relationship with administrators (Deans, Provosts), etc.) on your campus?

   Probe: Did you notice any changes in your relationships with them? Did they strengthen, weaken, etc.? If so, how?

6) Did you use academic advising services on your campus? If so, please describe your relationship with your advisor(s).

   Probe: Can you tell me more about the ways you were helped/supported by your academic advisor?

   Probe: Can you tell me about the ways in which you were not supported by your advisor(s)? To what do you attribute the lack of support

7) What support, if any, did you receive while you were attending community college?

   Probe: If support was received, ask the participant to describe the types of support received (parental, financial, community, student group, etc.)

   Probe: How do you feel your experience would have been different without that support?

8) To what extent was your family (spouse, children, parents, etc.) involved in your life as a community college student? If they were involved, please describe their involvement.

9) Describe your engagement in student life/activities not related to the {name of BMI program}?

   Probe: What informed your decision to get involved?

   Probe: If you were not engaged in such activities, why not?

10) Describe the student support services you use/used at the college?

    Probe: Did you use any additional support services? List areas of support (academic support, librarian/research support, writing center, counseling center, career center, etc.)

11) What advice would you offer other Black males in order to successfully complete college?

    Probes: If not offered, ask for the advice they would offer in the following areas: social/personal, academic, extracurricular.

12) Please describe your reason(s) for joining {name of BMI program}.

Probe: If you could go back in time, and were presented the opportunity to join the program again, would you still join? If so, why? If not, why?

13) Please describe your experiences as a member of a minority male support program.

    Probe: Do you feel that your experiences at the community college would have been different had you not participated in {name of BMI program}? If so, please describe for me.

14) What part of the program did you feel was most instrumental to your success?

    Probe: can you tell me more about this aspect of your experience in the program?

15) How would you describe your relationship with the program leaders/mentors?

    Probe: Describe how these relationships developed, strengthened, changed, over the course of time.

16) Reflecting on your participation in {name of BMI program}, is there anything that you would change about the program?

17) We're at the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experiences while attending community college?

18) Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences with me. This is the end of the interview.