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**THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION BLACK MEN AT A
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION AND THE IMPACT OF SENSE OF
BELONGING ON THEIR SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC INTEGRATION**

by

Mir Hatef Alavi Tabrizi

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
March 31, 2020

Dissertation Advisor: James Coaxum, Ph.D.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing and supportive family. My parents sacrificed their entire life and moved from Iran to the United States so that my siblings and I can create a better future for ourselves. Ferry and Baba Joon, there are no words to describe what you mean to me. I thank God for blessing me with two loving, caring, selfless, hardworking, and beautiful parents. You have been by my side since birth and through thick and thin. You believed in me even when at times, I did not believe in myself. You cheered me on during my victories, picked me up during my defeats, guided me when I felt loss, and humbled me when I was getting a head of myself. This earned degree is just a small token of appreciation for all your hard work, dedication, love, and support throughout my life. I would not have been able to accomplish this goal without you. From the bottom of my heart, THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING and I LOVE YOU BOTH. To my brothers, Homan and Hamed, this is for you as well. You motivate me to be better and to do better and I hope I have represented everything that our family stands for. I love you both and thank you for your support.

Additionally, I want to dedicate this dissertation to my late friend, Jannette Gee, who passed away on April 26, 2017. Janette, I promised myself to honor you by completing this degree. I hope you are having the best of time in heaven and that you continue to rest in paradise. I miss you! Lastly, I want to dedicate this dissertation to the late great Kobe Bean Bryant, his daughter GiGi Bryant, and seven other victims who lost their lives on January 26, 2020. Kobe, you were my ALL-TIME favorite player and you instilled the mamba mentality in me. I will continue to honor you by inspiring people so they can be great at whatever they want to do. Rest in Paradise 2-8/24!

Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank God for giving me the opportunity to pursue my dreams and goals and permitting me with the strength and courage to successfully complete my doctoral degree. I also want to thank my committee members for their unwavering support throughout the last four years. I have learned so much from each of my committee members and I am thankful for their encouragement and love. I especially, want to thank my Chair and mentor, Dr. James Coaxum for his love and support over the last 16 years, and for guiding through this process over the last four years. I would not have been successful in completing my degree without his guidance and encouragement. Additionally, I want to acknowledge my cohort members/friends for an unforgettable four years. I came into this process with a lot of uncertainties and fear, however, I felt confident in succeeding in this program because I knew I had all of them in my corner. I would like to give a special shout out to Team No Life (JP, Jossie, and Karen) for being the best team one can hope for. We have endured a lot over the last four years, and you all made it worthwhile. Thank you and I love you all. Finally, I want to acknowledge my late grandfather who passed away right before the program started. Every time I spoke with him, he said, “Hatef joon, I am praying the best for you and I know you will be successful!” Aghajoon, delam barat tang shodeh. Ay kashke inja boodi va mitoonesti doctor gereftanamo bebini. Khoda biomorzatet. En movafaghiatam malle shomamhast. I love you!

Abstract

Mir Hatef Alavi Tabrizi

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION BLACK MEN AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION AND THE IMPACT OF SENSE OF BELONGING ON THEIR SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC INTEGRATION

2019-2020

James Coaxum, Ph.D.

Doctor of Education

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a predominantly White institution (PWI). Through using Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) college sense of belonging and Tinto's (1993) student integration model of attrition theories, I examined the overall college experiences of FGBM at a PWI. When first-generation college students enter college, they are faced with academic, social, and financial challenges that make navigating college difficult (Ishitani, 2006). Additionally, Black undergraduate male students are faced with microaggressions, discrimination, alienation, stereotype, and cultural issues when they enroll in college (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008). These experiences have made navigating college more difficult for FGBM. This study advanced the research by looking at the association between FGBM's sense of belonging on campus and their overall campus integration at a predominantly White institution. The findings of this research indicated that FGBM experienced a sense of belonging on campus; however, most participants felt that their sense of belonging was limited to a smaller community at South Jersey University. This subcommunity was referred to as Black South Jersey University and consisted of many students of color, including Black student population, and social events that targeted Black students. That sense of connectedness to their subcommunity, faculty/staff, and peers enhanced FGBM's campus integration and sense of belonging.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Higher education is one of the critical factors in providing individuals with the opportunity for social mobility, economic progress, financial stability, and success (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). However, the pathway to higher education is not always equal and equitable for all students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). The college transition process for every student who enrolls in a higher education institution is unique and different. For first-generation college students (FGCSs), the transition of going to college is far more convoluted than those students who do not identify as first-generation. FGCSs undergo immense transformations as they look for ways to navigate the difficult terrain from high school to college and the adaptation into the culture of academia as well as the social life (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007). Often, FGCSs experience numerous challenges in the midst of their transition into college and these challenges can lead to poor academic and social experiences as well as a lack of belonging on campus. Eventually, these challenges can lead to their ultimate withdrawal from the institution (Ishitani, 2006). Some of these challenges are financial, academic, familial, and lack of integration into the cultural and social aspects of the university environment (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007).

First-Generation College Students

Scholars have discussed FGCSs from multiple perspectives. Several scholars refer to FGCSs as students whose parents have attended some college, but never completed their degree; as a result, they do not have postsecondary education or training (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Hsiao, 1992; Mitchell, 1997). Other scholars have described FGCSs as

students who come from a family in which neither parent nor guardian has attained a college degree (Schwartz et al., 2018). Despite the variations in defining FGCSs, the most widely accepted definition of FGCSs used by scholars is an individual whose parents have not obtained a four-year college degree (Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Goodwin, 1998; Hicks, 2003; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). For the purpose of this study, FGCSs are defined as students whose parents or guardians have never attended a two-year or a four-year institution.

First-generation college students comprised 22% of the total college student population from 1993-2000 (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). At the same time, 43% of FGCSs left college without completing their degree in the United States between 1992-2000 (Chen, 2005; Petty, 2014). Over the past decade, higher education institutions have seen an increase of 4.5 million FGCSs enrolling in college programs in the United States (Petty, 2014). These statistics alone suggest the need to focus on FGCSs as more are enrolling in colleges and universities and a large percentage of that population are not completing their degree programs. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education reported that nearly 32% of college students at 4-year institutions come to college from families where neither parent has completed a postsecondary education (Schwartz et al., 2018). This indicated that more FGCSs are enrolling in colleges and universities without knowledge on higher education system and not knowing how to navigate the college environment. The lack of familiarity with navigating the college environment has presented several obstacles for FGCSs and their family members.

As Collier and Morgan (2008) indicated, FGCSs are less likely to graduate college compared to those students who have at least one parent with a postsecondary

education degree. Additionally, FGCSs tend to take on more remedial courses due to the lack of rigor in their high school curriculum (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Furthermore, FGCSs enroll in college part-time, earn lower grades, feel less prepared for college, and are less likely to discuss any feelings of stress compared to their peers, which leads to students experiencing higher stress levels (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Other challenges facing FGCSs include but are not limited to their high school to college transition, relationships, work, finances, decision-making responsibilities (Gist-Mackey, Wiley, & Erba, 2018), the desire to live close to home, and having the presence of their family members in their daily activities (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Moreover, FGCSs typically come from low-socioeconomic families, differ in race, ethnicity, age, and gender; and may not have a great deal of time to delegate to their academics due to work commitments and aiding their family with finances (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). These factors have led FGCSs to have lower academic achievement and a lack of sense of belonging on the campus environment (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). In other words, due to the lack of social and cultural capital, coupled with their commitment to their familial and financial responsibilities, FGCSs are forced to live off campus, work multiple jobs, and devote less time to their academic responsibilities and social interests (Williams & Ferrari, 2015).

FGCSs are more likely to be a part of racial minority group (Checkoway, 2018; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Students who belong to a racial minority group face a different set of challenges when they enter higher education institutions. These challenges include lack of equitable level of advising and mentoring (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003), feeling discrimination within the campus environment and

classroom setting (Nora & Cabrera, 1996), perceiving racial tension on campus, and witnessing faculty members stereotyping against different racial and ethnic groups at their institution (Barnes & Lightsey, 2005; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Researchers have also discovered that FGCSs are more likely to lack social and cultural capital compared to continuing-generation college students and are less informed about college choice, application process, decision-making, and different academic and extracurricular activities that are available to them (Havlik, Pulliam, Malott, & Steen, 2017).

These barriers that FGCSs face are even more troubling for Black men in higher education. In addition to the barriers above, Black male undergraduate students have experienced a lack of inclusive environment, on campus miscommunications between instructors/counselors and students, not being aware of the resources that are available to them, having to battle gender, race, and student identity development issues, stereotypes and microaggressions, and not having access to high quality professional mentors can be a burden to African American male undergraduate students (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Harris III & Lester, 2009). Experiencing stereotype threat requires a great amount of energy to acknowledge, process, and respond to and it has a negative impact on academic performance (Larde, 2012). In addition to that, male gender role conflict has been connected to alcohol and drug abuse, men shying away from seeking help and finding coping mechanisms, depression, and homophobia and fear of femininity (Harris III & Lester, 2009). Lastly, professional mentors have provided Black men with important information regarding their academic and professional matters, critical thinking skills, effective note-taking strategies, applying to graduate schools, and securing scholarships (Vega & Moore, 2012). All these stressors that first-generation college students and

Black men have faced in higher education have made it very difficult when both populations intersect with one another; making it more challenging for first-generation Black men to succeed in higher education in the United States.

Black Men in Higher Education

The access, persistence, retention, and graduation of African American male undergraduate students continue to be one of the salient issues in higher education by a large margin (Brooms, 2018a; Hall, 2017; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Given the systemic challenges behind racial achievement and opportunity gaps in higher education and their impact on Black male undergraduate students, postsecondary institutions have searched for tactics to address the racial achievement and opportunity gaps of Black men in higher education (Harper & Harris III, 2012). Currently, Black male undergraduate students comprise 3.5% of the total enrollment in higher education institutions (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Research indicated that the 6-year graduation rate of undergraduate Black male students from a four-year institution is at 34%, which is the lowest amongst their White male peers (61%) and Black female student counterparts (44%) (Kena et al., 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Strayhorn, 2017). This indicates that gender and racial disparities in higher education has a major influence on persistence and retention rates of Black men in postsecondary education. Researchers continue to highlight the fact that race and gender create more stressors for Black men in higher education, which have affected their social, academic, and sense of belonging on campus (Bridges, 2011; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007).

Similar to the experiences of first-generation students, it is expected that many students of color, especially Black men who attend PWIs, will experience some

psychological stress and have a tumultuous college transition process (Harper, 2009b). These expectations begin as early as K-12 and follows them all the way through college (Harper, 2009b). As a result, Black men have found themselves feeling overwhelmed by the rigor of their courses and fail to meet the expectations of their professors (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2009b). Strayhorn (2008a) stated that it is unlikely for Black men to have a supportive relationship from anyone outside of their own race at PWIs; however, those Black men who tend to have that supportive type of relationship with people outside of their own race have a positive sense of belonging on campus and have been more successful toward persistence and degree attainment. Additionally, Black men have been recognized as one of the most disengaged student populations in colleges and universities, which has contributed to their lack of sense of belonging at PWIs (Harper, 2009b). In a study that was done by Cuyjet (1997), the findings posited that Black men study less than Black women, do not take as many notes compared to their Black female counterparts, seldom spend time writing and revising papers, and participate in less collaborative projects in the classroom than Black women respondents (Harper, 2009b). This could be due to their level of disengagement in the classroom, and lack of knowledge of various academic resources that are available to them. Those behaviors have led to Black men developing a lack of sense of belonging on campus and classroom settings at PWIs.

Historically, Black students at four-year institutions have persisted and graduated at a lower rate compared to their White and Asian counterparts (Brooms, 2018b; Jackson, Jackson, Liles, & Exner, 2013; Owens, Lacey, Rvals, & Holbert-Quince, 2010). These issues have continued to be problematic, especially for Black male students at PWIs

(Jackson et al., 2013). The reasons behind the continuation of this trend is that Black men still experience isolation, condescension, frustration, discomfort, and exhaustion at PWIs (Jackson et al., 2013). They also reported experiencing a high level of microaggressions within their social and academic environments, which have impacted their daily lives in negative ways, decreasing their level of self-efficacy while increasing the level of attrition and psychological distress (Jackson et al., 2013). William and Ferrari (2015) further stated that FGCSs, especially those who identify as students of color and come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds have a more positive campus perception and satisfaction when they find positive and supportive faculty and peer relationships. However, student-faculty engagement has not been consistent for Black male students (William & Ferrari, 2015).

Harper (2009a) argued that African American male students do not reap the benefits of being engaged with faculty. In a longitudinal study conducted by Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS), findings demonstrated that 66.9% of Black men “never” had any type of informal encounter with another faculty member during their first academic year (Wood & Newman, 2017). In that same study, 27.4% of Black male students reported that they “sometimes” met with their faculty members, and only 5.7% indicated that they “often” met with their professors (Wood & Newman, 2017). The needs of Black men are vastly different from their White men counterparts in that Black men have differed in social capital, experienced prejudice and racism, lacked mentorship, and rarely have had the adequate resources to navigate their college experiences (Wood & Newman, 2017). Because of the differences in their needs and experiences, Black men have been in a greater demand of different forms of interaction and engagement with

faculty, campus resources, and constituents (Wood & Newman, 2017). However, it is less likely for Black men to receive the type of engagement and support they need from their institution (Bush & Bush, 2010). The lack of institutional support could have had implications for Black men's social and academic integration in college. Like FGCSs, first-generation Black men who are enrolled in colleges go through similar experiences; however, Black men have the added component of race that has made their overall college experiences less pleasant. Ultimately, FGCSs as well as Black men enrolled in college, experience a lack of sense of belonging and social and academic integration on college campus. This signals a need to study these two constructs in tandem.

Problem Statement

Hebert (2018) indicated that nearly 50% of all college students identify as first-generation and nearly 34% of those students enroll in 4-year institutions. FGCSs mostly identify as students of color and come from low-income backgrounds (Hebert, 2018; Engle & Tinto, 2008). FGCSs enter college less academically prepared, are less likely to attend high school with more rigorous curriculum, are highly unlikely to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, lack critical thinking skills, and face greater dropout rates than continuing-generation college students (Furquim et al., 2017; Gibson & Woodside, 2014; Gofen, 2009; Hebert, 2018; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard; 2007). Being a FGCS coupled with identifying as an African American male has created an even greater challenge for first-generation Black men (FGBM). African American males can either be praised or vilified, and more often, they are viewed from a deficit model as opposed to an asset point of view (Brown, 2012). Additionally, Black men find it more difficult to be socially accepted at PWIs and find themselves at odds with being

academically responsible (Brown, 2012). Demonstrations of institutional racism have been greatly embedded in the societal perceptions of Black men and these perceptions have greatly impacted African American male students internally and externally (Brown, 2012). All of these experiences have significantly contributed to various challenges that FGBM encounter at PWIs.

Several research studies have revealed that FGCSs and Black men are at greater risk when they enroll in college and they experience a higher attrition rate compared to continuing-generation college students (Furquim et al., 2017; Gist-Mackey et al., 2018; Pratt, Harwood, Cavazos, & Ditzfeld, 2017; Woosley & Shepler, 2012). Pratt et al. (2017) denoted that of millions of students who enroll in 4-year colleges in the United State, 20% of them identify as first-generation. Of that percentage, 71% of them are more likely to withdraw or leave college in their first year compared to their counterparts (Pratt et al., 2017). This is a significant difference even after controlling for race, gender, family income, and high school grade point average (Pratt et al., 2017). FGCSs are significantly affected by their poor social and academic integration in postsecondary education systems (Davis 2010; Wilkins, 2014; Woosley & Shepler, 2012). However, the social and academic integration is even more troubling for Black male students, especially those who also identify as first-generation.

According to Strayhorn (2012), 66% of Black men who enroll in 4-year institutions tend to drop out of college, making their attrition rate the highest among all sexes and racial/ethnic groups. One of the key factors that has contributed to the success and retention of Black men at PWIs is their personal academic and social experiences (Schewitzer, Griffen, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Black men who attend PWIs are faced

with a set of different challenges than FGCSs. They have encountered racial and ethnic racism and stereotypes, and portrayed as lazy, thugs, ghetto, and troubled men (Schewtizer et al., 1999). Engaging in this racial battle fatigue coupled with overcoming barriers of also being FGCSs, have made the college transition and adjustment difficult for FGBM at PWIs. Although there have been several research studies on first-generation and Black men exclusively, the gap in the literature does not address issues that those two populations encounter as one.

In a study that was done by Sinanan (2012), it was reported that Black men's perception of and experiences with their social environment at PWIs have a major implication on their learning experiences and campus integration. Having institutional support has helped students to have greater college satisfaction and increased students' graduation rates (Robertson & Mason, 2008; Sinanan, 2016; Wang & Nuru, 2017). Similarly, when there is a meaningful level of participation from Black students in programs and activities that address their social environment uncertainties, they tend to have an enhanced transition and adjustment to their institution, which then improves their retention rate (Sinanan, 2016). Some of these programs have been in the form of extracurricular activities, formal and informal mentoring programs, and race-based initiatives, which are associated with developing a positive self-concept and Black male college students' success (Robertson & Mason, 2008; Sinanan, 2016).

Extra-curricular activities have been one of the main determinant factors of Black male undergraduate students in terms of improving their self-esteem, facilitation of social adjustment, and college completion (Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Robertson & Mason, 2008). Specifically, Greek life or fraternal membership in historically Black Greek-

lettered organizations has been one of the identifying factors that have demonstrated a positive social and academic integration, which is also associated with improved GPA and retention (McClure, 2006; Robertson & Mason, 2008). Being involved in athletic teams has also been linked to improving self-esteem and social adjustment. Athletic affiliation has been correlated to Greek membership and gives Black students a sense of support and community belonging (McClure, 2006). Additionally, being involved in other leadership positions on campus have assisted with improving self-esteem, being connected to a community, and campus adjustment (McClure, 2006). For example, in a study that was done by Brown (2006), the result reported when Black male students are involved with Student Government Association and intramural athletic teams, they had a positive interaction among their male peers and were retained at a higher level. Therefore, being involved in extra-curricular activities is essential to social integration and establishing a sense of belonging on campus.

First-generation Black men have faced cultural, societal, academic, social, and financial challenges that their continuing generation White peers have not (Jones & Michelle 2006; Robertson & Mason 2008). Failure to identify the issues that impact Black men's persistence and graduation rates is an injustice to them. However, discovering the reasons behind their success and path toward persistence and graduation rates will provide context behind why FGBM are succeeding and provides postsecondary institutions an opportunity to design supports and services that will help with FGBM's sense of belonging and campus integration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the impact of sense of belonging on social and academic integration of FGBM at a PWI. FGCSs already come to college with numerous barriers and setbacks (Ishitani, 2006). On the other hand, Black men face challenges such as racial discrimination, reputation, financial need, academic skills, classroom involvement, and faculty engagement (Robertson & Mason, 2008). When combining these two populations together, the university attendance and graduation rate for first-generation Black men are at its lowest over the last quarter of the century (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Furthermore, students who are not socially and academically integrated into college life face a greater college incompleteness rate than those students who are integrated into the college environment. Considering that Black men exhibit the lowest retention and graduation rates among all gender and racial/ethnic populations (Strayhorn, 2017), investigating their level of sense of belonging could help with enhancing their campus integration, retention, and persistence rate.

According to the U. S. Census, it is predicted that by 2045, the United States will become minority White population (Frey, 2018), with approximately 30% of younger adults identifying as immigrants or coming from a family in which their parents are foreign-born (Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010). Additionally, it is predicted that the non-Hispanic White population will decrease by 10% between 2017 and 2060 (Russell, 2018). Moreover, the Black population will increase by 58% and Hispanics will increase by 89% (Russell, 2018). Despite this projection, White students and continuing-generation college students remain as the majority population with greater access to higher education and higher completion rates than FGCSs and students of color (Blackwell & Pinder,

2014; Engle, 2007; Furquim et al., 2017; Williams & Ferrari, 2015). Owens et al. (2010) indicated that nearly 55.7% of African Americans graduate high school and attend a four-year institution; however, there is still a great discrepancy in enrollment rates between White and African American students in the United States. This provides White students a greater socioeconomic status advantage over FGCSs and students of color, particularly Black students.

Other studies have discussed the importance of early college experiences and the immediate and longer effects of those experiences (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Woosley & Miller, 2009; Woosley & Shepler, 2012). Researchers have examined various transitional issues such as sense of belonging, social and academic integration, interpersonal relationships, homesickness, academic issues and preparation, self-efficacy, and institutional commitment (Harper, 2012; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008a; Woosley & Shepler, 2012). My research focused on the influence of sense of belonging on the social and academic integration of FGBM at a PWI.

Believing that one can succeed in college is important to advance from persistence to completion; however, it does not ensure it (Tinto, 2017a). Students who are enrolled in universities have to be engaged within the campus environment (Tinto, 2017a). Students must discover their community amongst their peers, and professional staff who believe in them and value their membership, making them feel they matter and that they belong to a greater community (Tinto, 2017a). Sense of belonging is shaped by the broader campus climate and the way in which students, professional staff, and administrators interact with one another (Tinto, 2017a).

The student perception of interactions, engagement, and relationships that are developed between themselves and their counterparts is what creates a sense of belonging for college students (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Mhattacharya, 2010). Black men's perception of their interactions and engagement is very different than their counterparts due to experiencing sociocultural differences, battling systemic racism and stereotypes, and having a difficult time integrating into a community that is very different from their home environment (Bell, 2004; Irving & Hudley, 2008). The negative perception of interactions and engagement have hindered Black men from having a higher persistence and graduation rates and achieving academic excellence.

Black men in colleges and universities have a greater dropout rate compared to other ethnic groups and all sexes (Strayhorn, 2017). When Black male undergraduate students interact with students from diverse backgrounds, experience a positive campus climate, are treated fairly, and have a strong sense of acceptance, they tend to have a greater overall college experience (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Williams & Ferrari, 2015). In contrast, when they experience a negative racial campus climate, do not interact with individuals, and are mistreated and stereotyped against, they have a less pleasurable overall college experience (Ancis et al., 2000; Guiffrida, 2006).

Research indicated that there is a greater sense of belonging for Black men at PWIs when they interact with peers from various racial/ethnic groups (Harper, 2009b; Strayhorn, 2008a). Strayhorn (2012) suggested that sense of belonging is a basic human need that allows students to feel respected, valued, accepted, cared for, included, and mattered. However, Black men's sense of belonging on campus is in jeopardy when they experience racial stereotypes that label them as dumb jokes, criminals who do not belong

on a college campus, affirmative action beneficiaries, or underprepared “at risk” students who enroll in college from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and urban ghettos (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2009b; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2007). Experiencing racial stereotypes and discriminations at PWIs have created major college transition, adjustment, and sense of belonging issues for Black men (Harper, 2009b).

Establishing a sense of belonging is an essential component of student success, especially for at risk students such as ethnic minorities, academically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, FGCSs, and those who come from low-socioeconomic status (O’Keeffe, 2013). A sense of connection takes place if students can foster a relationship with one key individual within the institution, whether it is academically or socially (O’Keeffe, 2013). It is also salient for institutions to demonstrate their level of “care” to students because it shows them that the institution values their presence and their overall academic success (O’Keeffe, 2013; Tinto, 2017b). Students being socially and academically integrated into the college environment is salient to their persistence and completion rates as well.

Integration refers to the assimilation of the student into the social and academic aspect of the university (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Tinto (1993) argued that individual’s departure from institutions can be viewed as arising out of a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, and dispositions. Some of the factors that are associated with social and academic integration and sense of belonging are peer interactions and relationships, campus involvement (Woosley & Shepler, 2012), student-faculty engagement, class environment, course offerings related to African American

experiences (Booker, 2007; Johnson, 2001; Robertson & Mason, 2008), racial harmony, living on campus (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007), positive and supportive faculty and peer relationships, inclusive and welcoming campus climates, and perception of fair treatment and acceptance (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). While it is important to be supported and integrated into the campus environment, having a sense of belonging to a community is also critical to retention and persistence of Black men in higher education.

When FGBM are exposed to negative experiences at PWIs, it limits their ability to be engaged with their peers and faculty members, it prevents them from gaining developmental skills, it creates isolation and alienation; ultimately, they lack a sense of belonging on their campuses, which impacts their college social and academic integration (Brooms, 2018ab; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2009b; Schwitzer et al., 1999).

Considering the amount of research that has been done on FGCSs and Black men, it is important to further research the retention and persistence rate of these two populations as a whole.

Research Questions

This qualitative study seeks to better understand the sense of belonging of first-generation Black men at a PWI and the way in which it impacts their social and academic integration. There are two overarching research questions followed by a sub-question that guided this study. These questions were:

1. How do first-generation Black men describe their sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution?
2. How does sense of belonging impact the academic and social integration of first-generation Black men at a predominantly White institution?

- a. What campus resources and support systems do first-generation Black men perceive to be important to their sense of belonging and social and academic integration into campus?

Significance of the Study

This research focused on the lived experiences of FGBM at a predominantly White institution through the theoretical frameworks of sense of belonging and social and academic integration. The results of this study could benefit institutions and their practices on supporting first-generation Black men. Through the findings, institutions are able to assess their resources and supports that are offered to FGBM and find ways to strengthen or improve their services. Furthermore, it is important for colleges and universities to have preventive intervention strategies in place so that they can address particular problems that impact the sense of belonging and campus integration of FGBM (Schweitzer et al., 1999).

There are also implications for faculty and administrators, especially those who identify as White professionals. Wood and Newman (2017) stated that faculty's positive or negative behavior inside of the classroom setting has a significant impact on FGCSs and Black men. Understanding the needs of these student populations is critical to pedagogical strategies, the type of language that is used, and the level of support that is needed from faculty in order for students to succeed. Faculty can learn how to be engaged through professional development opportunities and orientation sessions that focus on the impact of their actions and behaviors on their students' success and classroom pedagogy (Wood & Newman, 2017).

Due to the fact that more FGCSs and students of color are enrolling in 4-year institutions, colleges and universities could be motivated to establish an office or department that focuses on FGCSs. The findings of this research would provide these departments with rich data and information that is needed in order to create initiatives and practices that are suited toward the need of first-generation and African American populations. These programs could vary from black men initiatives to student mentoring programs, weekly forum discussions around supporting FGCSs or FGBM, or having orientation sessions specifically for FGCSs. Through these efforts, students can ease their way into college, learn about the resources that are available to them, and acquire tactics that can assist them with their social and academic integration into a campus environment and having a positive sense of belonging.

This study further benefits students and their families. The parents of FGCSs lack knowledge in college-going processes, rigorous curriculum, ways in which they could support their students, and the lack of familiarity with educational and institutional terminologies. On the other hand, FGBM can learn about ways in which they can find their community at PWIs, how to foster student-faculty relationships, and ways in which they can cope with experiencing racial battle fatigue. Having a great level of understanding and knowledge on how to navigate those opportunities could not only help institutions to provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment for their students, but it could also help FGBM to have a higher persistence and retention rate at PWIs.

The persistence and retention of college students is impacted by their social and academic integration and sense of belonging on campus (Strayhorn, 2008b; Tinto, 1993). The academic integration involves faculty-student engagement, positive campus climate,

classroom environment, and being treated fairly (Ancis et al., 2000; Williams & Ferrari, 2015). On the other hand, social integration has had a broader scope and includes the overall social experiences of students, peer-to-peer interactions, campus engagement, and their overall well-being (Robertson & Mason, 2008; Sinanan, 2016; Wang & Nuru, 2017). Amongst the aspects of social and academic integration and adjustment, which are important to the development of social and academic system of students, having a sense of belonging on a community is noted to be important (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Harper, 2009b; Strayhorn, 2008a). However, the social and academic integration of FGBM has been faced with more turbulence than their counterparts, which has accounted for their high attrition rate. This study explored the lived experiences of FGBM using Strayhorn's (2012) College Students' Sense of Belonging theory and Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition.

Summary

First-generation college students (FGCSs) enter college with a lack of familiarity with postsecondary education, academically unprepared, and with very little to no support from their family at home (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Ishitani, 2006). Many FGCSs attend college part-time, have low GPAs, feel less prepared for college, and struggle with discussing their feelings with their peers, which leads to students experiencing higher stress levels (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Furthermore, the majority of FGCSs identify as students of color, take more remedial courses, and have a more difficult college transition compared to their continuing-generation college student counterparts (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018). Specifically, those FGCSs who identify as Black men have an even more difficult time navigating their college experiences due to

experiencing systemic racism, discrimination, and prejudice (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008ab). These experiences have impacted the sense of belonging and social and academic integration of first-generation Black men at PWIs, which has resulted in them having a higher attrition rate compared to their White male counterparts (Strayhorn, 2008b). This study further explored the lived experiences of first-generation and Black men in tandem through sense of belonging and social and academic integration conceptual frameworks.

Definition of Terminology

There were various key terms used in this research that are important to understand. The following definitions may be pertinent to this study:

Academic integration – The adaptation of student’s academic and campus climate opportunities on a campus environment.

Black men – Male students who identify as African American descent or Black Americans.

Continuing-generation college students – Students with at least one parent or guardian who graduated from a two-year or four-year institution.

Extra curriculum campus involvement – Participation in campus activities such as social or cultural group organizations, student government association, campus recreation, Greek life, student activities, residential life, or holding leadership and non-leadership positions on campus.

First-generation college students – Students with neither parent or guardian having graduated from a two-year or four-year institution.

Gender – Distinction in sex of whether a student is male or a female.

Persistence – Individual or student-level measure of success.

Predominantly White institutions – Type of institutions that were established for predominantly White students.

Race – Individual’s racial identity as African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, American Indian, Asian, or other.

Retention – An institutional measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution and the advancement from year one all the way through graduation.

Sense of belonging – A simple human need and motivation that influences one’s behavior.

Social integration – The adaptation of student’s social opportunities and college life on a campus environment.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Over the past 80 years, the United States has witnessed a major increase in college enrollment and completion (Horowitz, 2018). The percentage of students obtaining a higher education degree has increased from 7.7% to 31.7% between 1950-2010 (Horowitz, 2018). Higher education is one of many paths that leads individuals to greater social mobility, economic growth, a sense of achievement, employment opportunities, and working in higher status jobs (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Kyllonen, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017a), by 2026, the employment rate in the United States is projected to increase by 11.5 million. Additionally, 54% of jobs that will be created will require a postsecondary education and only 3.9% will require a high school diploma by 2024 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017b). A higher education degree is of great value to all student, helping to provide them with economic gains, higher earnings, and greater career opportunities (Ishitani, 2006).

Although there are great benefits associated with obtaining a postsecondary education such as having a better life and a sense of accomplishment, higher income, job security and stability, and higher level of psychological well-being and happiness, certain populations are less likely to attend and graduate from a higher education institution, making it difficult for them to reap those benefits (Ishitani, 2006, Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Horowitz, 2018; Tate, Caperton, Kaiser, Pruitt, White, & Hall, 2015). First-generation college students (FGCSs), most of whom come from low-income background and identify as students of color do not share a similar path to higher education compared

to continuing-generation college students and their White counterparts (Coffman, 2011; Engle, 2007). Additionally, attending college is even highly unlikely for Black men than any other sex and racial minority groups (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010, Harper, 2009a). This literature review focused on the background and characteristics of FGCSs, their experiences on navigating two worlds, challenges they face, and determinant factors that impact their retention and persistence rate. Then, an overview of Black students' experiences in society and colleges is provided followed by challenges that Black men faced at PWIs, and factors that influenced their retention and persistence rate. Lastly, the theoretical frameworks by Strayhorn (2012) and Tinto (1993) about sense of belonging and campus integration is discussed.

First-Generation College Students

Background and characteristics. First-generation college students are a growing population in the United States, and they are emerging as one of the most important student populations in all colleges and universities (Castello, Ballin, Daimond, Gao, 2018). There are many different variations of the definition of FGCSs. Some researchers describe this population as students with parents who never attended a university at all, while others define FGCSs as those with parents with “some” college experience, but never graduated (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Davis, 2010; Ishitani, 2006). Although there are similarities between the definitions, this research study defined FGCSs as students whose parents or guardians did not attend a two-year or a four-year institution. The characteristics of FGCSs greatly differ from continuing-generation college students, which contributes to FGCSs experiencing higher dropout rate than their counterparts.

First-generation college students generally come from a low-income family and are disproportionately overrepresented in the most disadvantaged groups when it relates to enrolling and participating in higher education (Castello et al., 2018; Coffman, 2011; Engle, 2007). Demographically, FGCSs are more likely to be older, Black or Hispanic, have dependent children, attend two-year or for-profit institutions, work full-time and have a part-time college enrollment status, register for remedial courses, and withdraw and/or repeat classes (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Chen, 2016; Engle 2007, Furquim et al., 2017). Research further denoted that FGCSs are less likely to take college standardize tests (ACT and SAT), and those who do take college entrance exams tend to score the lowest among their peers (Inkelas et al., 2007). Additionally, FGCSs attend college to honor their family or pursue future financial aspirations; however, when they do enroll in college, they feel less academically prepared, earn lower grades, are less involved in college activities, have lower educational aspiration, and perform poorly in the math and sciences compared to continuing-generation college students (Bui, 2002; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Petty 2014; Prospero & Vohran-Gupta, 2007; Reid & Moore, 2008).

Challenges of First-Generation College Students

Due to the hidden status of FGCSs, they may not be recognized or acknowledged among other groups and their social, cultural, and academic needs are too often overlooked (Kish, 2003). When FGCSs arrive to college on their own, they are naïve about the campus culture as well as the role of their family in their lives, and experience mixed feelings of hope, confidence, self-doubt, and motivation (Kish, 2003). These feelings and expectations forces FGCSs to live in two different worlds: the world of

higher education and being committed to their family's socio-cultural backgrounds (Petty, 2014).

Knowledge on postsecondary education. When comparing the differences between FGCSs and continuing-generation college students, the distinct disadvantages between the two student populations are evident. These disadvantages occur before enrolling in college, during college, and after graduation (Gofen, 2009). Disadvantages prior to enrollment include lack of knowledge on postsecondary education such as the application process for admission, financial aid systems, lack of finances, academic readiness, moral support from family members, low educational expectations and plans, as well as minimal academic preparation in high school (Gofen, 2009). During and after the collegiate experiences of FGCSs, these disadvantages are reflected in their high attrition rate before completing their degree, and it continues through their early career outcomes (Gofen, 2009; Waburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

Because FGCSs are first in their family to attend college, they lack familiarity with college admission process, the campus culture and climate, and what it means to be a college student (Inkelas et al., 2007; Davis, 2010). This population is also new to the language, insider knowledge, institutional practices, and resources available to students (Davis, 2010). Individuals who assume that they are familiar with FGCSs believe that they can aid those students by simply getting them a tour of the campus, bringing them to various offices where they can pay their bills, sign up for housing, and register for classes (Davis, 2010). However, becoming familiar with the college culture, creating a sense of fit, and navigating the bureaucratic organization of higher education system is more complex than that and it is a challenge that FGCSs experience to a greater degree than

continuing-generation college students (Davis, 2010; Ishitani, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

FGCSs have limited access to information about higher education and the expectations that institutions have of them (Hirudayaraj, 2011). Institutions of higher education have provided college students with ample sources of information, which are designed to help students have an easier transition to college. For continuing-generation college students, these sources of information could be introduced to them by their parents, siblings, or friends because of their previous access to higher education or personal and academic experiences (Schwartz et al., 2018). As a result, when they arrive to college, they have a stronger sense of social capital (Schwartz et al., 2018). Social capital is referred to as information, support, and resources accessible to people through networking and connections (Schwartz et al., 2018). Social capital is important, especially for any marginalized student population because it provides support and assistance in any social environment (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In contrast, when FGCSs first come to college, they have experienced isolation, limited themselves to just one or two sources of information, and lacked social capital greatly (Davis, 2010). Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2012) and Sanchez, Esparza, Berardi, & Pryce (2011) stated that in the midst of transitioning to college, students' accessibility to their social capital shrinks and their strong connection to their previous community begins to weaken, especially for first-generation and low-income students. As such, students must find a way to maintain their relationships from their past communities while building new and meaningful relationships and connections when they enroll in college. Another barrier that has impacted persistence of FGCSs in college is family involvement.

Family involvement. During the adolescent years, children desire more autonomy and independence in addition to guidance and direction from their family members as they make decision about their academics and learning (Wang & Nuru 2017). According to Harvard Family Research Project (2007), adolescence is a phrase where young kids establish their own identities, practice autonomous self-expressions, and partake in complex experiences that will help with developing their competence and self-esteem. As children advance through their adolescence years, their family members begin to have conversations about their academic expectations from their children, create opportunities for their children where they can take responsibility for their academic work, and create a meaningful plan for their future (Rosenberg & Lopez, 2010; Wang Nuru, 2017). The level of family engagement during the adolescence years have been linked to positive academic outcomes such as growth in college enrollment rate (Rosenberg, Heymann, Lopez, & Westmoreland, 2010), decrease in attrition rate (Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2008), and academic achievement (Epstein, 2008). Other researchers have noted that when parents of students are engaged with their children's education process, they have a higher level of measure related to student achievement, attendance, behavior, educational expectations, and educational planning (Ferguson, Ramos, Rudo, & Wood, 2008). Despite the positive connection between family engagement and students' academic achievement, this experience has looked convoluted for FGCSs and their family members.

Due to the lack of familiarity with higher education system and not graduating from college, family members of FGCSs may not be able to advise students regarding ways in which they can navigate the college process and inform them of strategies that

can lead their students to succeed academically (Wang & Nuru, 2017). Additionally, FGCSs have strong ties to their family responsibilities (McKay & Estrella, 2008), which means because FGCSs identify as low-income students, they spend more time off campus attending to their familial obligations and working multiple jobs to help their families with finances (William & Ferrari, 2015). This forces FGCSs to spend less time on campus, which impacts their sense of belonging as well as their academic and social integration into campus (McKay & Estrella, 2008, Petty, 2014; Williams & Ferrari, 2015). There are other instances where families of FGCSs have played a positive role in the educational attainment of their students.

While the parents of FGCSs do not possess a college degree, it has been noted that sometimes, they do encourage their students to achieve both family and educational goals. Wang (2014) and Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) asserted that this is accomplished through parents of FGCSs reminding them about the importance of staying true to their roots, focusing on making their family a top priority, relying on their family as a strong support system, leading by example by modeling a true definition of college success for their younger siblings and community members, and avoiding family achievement guilt. Family achievement guilt is identified a new concept that assesses specific feelings of guilt about a person's academic achievement compared to the success of their family members (Covarrubias, Romero, Trivelli, 2015).

Family achievement guilt has made students feel uneasy for having access to more educational opportunities and college success than their family members; therefore, they have had to reduce their academic success when they are with their family members (Covarrubias et al., 2015). As difficult as is for FGCSs to avoid family achievement guilt,

they tend to experience it more as they surpass their parents' educational achievement by prioritizing interdependence with their family, be more engaged with their family, and live closer to them while involving them in their daily activities (Covarrubias and Fryberg, 2015; Wang & Nuru, 2017). This means that FGCSs feel guiltier for pursuing their own academic aspirations as they transition from high school to college.

A study conducted by Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015), looked at whether or not FGCSs and Latino college students experienced more family achievement guilt than continuing-generation college students and White students. They surveyed 121 undergraduate students (53 identified as FGCSs and 68 identified as non-first generation) and found out that FGCSs and Latino college students experienced more family achievement guilt than their counterparts (Covarrubias and Fryberg, 2015). The findings further denoted that there was a positive relationship between students' mental well-being and family achievement guilt; as a result of this guilt, student success was minimized (Covarrubias et al., 2015). This means that when FGCSs overcame the family achievement guilt and focused on their student success while utilizing their families as a support system, they were able to achieve their educational goals and aspirations.

Researchers further employed that family involvement also could serve as an important influence on the success of FGCSs (Azmitia, Syed, Radmacher, 2013; Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017). FGCSs have had a sense of obligation to stay connected to family and receive encouragement and emotional support (Azmitia et al., 2013). Additionally, having face-to-face interactions and support from family members have been documented as instrumental to FGCSs' academic outcome (Dennis, Phinney, Chuateco, 2005). The result of a study that was done by Cornelius-White, Garza, and Hoey (2004) suggested

that when FGCSs' family were engaged with the college-going process and students' college transition, students experienced a high level of academic achievement. Including parents in educational process have improved students' educational aspirations and reduced the negative affect of experiencing a culture shock (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Considering the benefits and the drawbacks of FGCSs' family engagement level, the reality is that not being familiar with the culture of higher education and its institutions have made it difficult for FGCSs' family to provide their students with much help, which has forced students to navigate the college life completely on their own (Davis, 2010). Although family involvement is critical in the experiences of FGCSs, academic preparation is also one of the major factors of their college experiences.

Academic preparedness. When it relates to comparing the academic preparedness of FGCSs with continuing-generation college students, researchers have explained that FGCSs are less academically prepared compared to their counterparts (Chen, 2005, D'Amico & Dika 2013; Engle, Bermeo, O'Brien, & Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, 2006; Pratt et al., 2017). Generally, FGCSs are ranked below continuing-generation college students when comparing GPA (Lee, Sax, Kim, & Hagedorn, 2004), advancing through the rigorous academic courses (Atherton, 2014; Choy, 2001; Cushman, 2007) and standardized test scores (Atherton, 2014, Choy, 2001). Researchers have further associated FGCSs' lack of access to social capital, lower high school engagement, and lower socioeconomic status to low academic performance, which has forced FGCSs to take more remedial courses (Chen 2005; Coffman, 2011; Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014). In fact, Engle and Tinto (2008) stated that 62% of FGCSs take variations of remedial courses before they register for

their major curriculum courses. Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) denoted having a strong sense of social capital fosters relationship among individuals, which allows for facilitation of transactions and the transmission of different resources. Social capital permits FGCSs to be connected to various faculty members, professional staff, and peers while having access to resources that would guide them toward being retained at a higher level (Pascarella et al., 2004). Establishing a relationship with faculty and professional staff members has created an opportunity for students to feel more comfortable attending office hours, seeking academic assistance, and finding ways to enhance their academic skills so that they can be enrolled in more rigorous academic courses (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Participating in rigorous academic courses have contributed to the academic success of students (Choy, 2001; Coffman, 2011; Warburton et al., 2001). Reid (2007) conducted a qualitative study on academic preparation for postsecondary education and the participants reported that they failed at developing effective study skills strategies in high school that would have helped them in college. Additionally, advanced math courses in high school have enhanced the college enrollment chances of FGCSs and narrowed their college attendance gap (Engle, 2007). Nevertheless, more often FGCSs have taken fewer advanced level mathematical and science courses, which have impacted their level of academic preparedness before enrolling in college (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013). Due to the fact that FGCSs are members of lower-socioeconomic classes, they work more hours than continuing-generation college students (Chen 2005; Ishitani, 2006; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). As a result, they are less focused on their academics and are more dedicated to home and community obligations. Having to focus on both attending their

family's needs and performing well academically have made it difficult for FGCSs to navigate two worlds.

Navigating two worlds. Hsiao (1992) indicated that FGCSs live in two different worlds: the world of college and the world of attending family responsibilities. Too often, FGCSs have a difficult time managing both worlds (Hsiao, 1992). Although attending college could be seen as a rite of passage, it has created a significant separation from FGCSs' past community, which is their home (Hsiao, 1992). Parents, siblings, or friends who have not attended college could serve as a distraction for FGCSs (Hsiao, 1992). Additionally, too often family members and friends of FGCSs encourage their students to not attend college, which forces them to reject their family or home community culture in order to achieve their non-familial academic aspirations (Gofen 2009; Inman & Mayes, 1999). As FGCSs begin to acculturate themselves in college through their professional attire, taste in music, embracing their academic responsibilities, and expanding their vocabulary, they feel anxious and uncomfortable leaving the culture in which they grew up in (Hsiao, 1992). This forces FGCSs to negotiate the competing pressures of staying committed to familial values and fulfilling their parent's wishes by achieving academic excellence and graduating college while focusing on pursuing their education without the support of their family (Hsiao, 1992; Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, & Serrata, 2016).

In their attempt to move away from the culture of home to the culture of college, FGCSs face many challenges; as a result of it, when they arrive to college, they experience a major "culture shock" (Gofen, 2009; Hsiao, 1992). In a study that was done by Collins (2010) on the impact of family involvement on pursuing a higher education degree, it was reported that some of the FGCSs spoke in favor of familial support while

others experienced more familial pressure, and few felt the nonexistence of their family in their pursue of higher education. In addition to the family pressures, when FGCSs enroll in college, they are under a great deal of educational pressure, which makes navigating both worlds very difficult. Kish (2003) further insisted that when FGCSs enroll in college, they experience a lack of institutional support and do not feel welcomed. FGCSs witness a dichotomy where they do not want to disconnect from their community at home even if the opportunity presents itself, and they do not feel accepted at their institutions due to prejudice, stereotypes, and marginalization (Kish, 2003).

FGCSs seek to gain power, comfort, hope, and a better life through higher education. This means, education becomes means to an end: the end of their family's financial barriers (Kish, 2003). Although research suggested that a higher education degree helps with career advancement, higher paying jobs, living an easier life, and having a healthy mental stability, for FGCSs it creates a personal separation from family (Kish, 2003). In the midst of college transition, FGCSs have to decide whether or not they are going to stop working, which could impact their financial commitment to their families, and they become different people where they have to find a balance between accepting their personal transition through education while maintaining connections and sustaining relationships with their past community (Kish, 2003). This has pressured FGCSs to mask their transition by pretending to be happy and comfortable and then quietly lurk in a place where they do not feel welcomed (Kish, 2003). FGCSs commitment to meeting their familial needs not only has negatively affected their academic preparedness, and campus involvement once they arrive to college.

Campus involvement. When students arrive to campus, it is essential on many different levels for them to be fully immersed in the campus environment so that they can socialize more with their peers on campus (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). For FGCSs, this has been a difficult task to accomplish, especially since many FGCSs live off campus to help their family with the cost of higher education or to assist with their family's financial needs (Schwartz et al., 2018). Because FGCSs tend to live off campus, they are less likely than continuing-generation college students to be engaged in social activities on campus (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). When FGCSs are not socially connected to the campus environment as well as to their peers, they feel less involved with various clubs and organizations and do not partake in extracurricular activities (Engle, 2007).

The lack of student engagement in their social settings have resulted in FGCSs feeling isolated, lacking excitement about college, and their persistence from first to second year being negatively affected (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Pike & Kuh, 2005). In a study that was done by Pascarella et al. (2004), FGCSs participation in extracurricular activities was positively correlated with degree plans, critical thinking, and academic success. To further substantiate this argument, Pascarella et al. (2004) discovered that although FGCSs were less likely to participate in campus activities than continuing-generation college students, FGCSs reaped the benefits of being involved in extra-curricular activities. Non-academic experiences impact the academic and cognitive development of students (Timberlake, n.d.). Research further postulated that the involvement of FGCSs in campus activities and programs has served as a mechanism to help them achieve greater academic success and

critical thinking skills compared to their continuing-generation college students (Timberlake, n.d.). Pascarella et al. (2004) revealed that “The social capital gained through extracurricular activities and peer involvement during college may be a particularly useful way for first-generation students to acquire the additional cultural capital that helps them succeed and benefit cognitively” (p. 278). Although campus involvement has helped with the retention and persistence rate of FGCSs, not all extracurricular activities have had a positive effect on them. Timberlake (n.d.) denoted that activities such as volunteer work and employment have a negative impact on the college adjustments of FGCSs. However, FGCSs are forced to work many hours because of the cost of higher education and having the need to support their family financially. Due to this financial barrier, FGCSs are in need of financial aid, which is another important element in their persistence

Financial aid. At one point, the value of higher education appeared unquestionable and the channel of resources to support academic programs, research, and student financial aid seemed steadfast (Alvarez & Marshall, 2018). However, with the rise of student populations, increase in federal research funds, and robust investment markets, the landscape of higher education in the United States has shifted (Alvarez & Marshall, 2018). Specifically, the amount of funding that is allocated to each state has diminished since the Great Recession, which shows no hope for rebuilding, even as the economy continues to improve (Alvarez & Marshall, 2018). The decline in state and federal funding has put a cost burden on many students and their family members, which has made college affordability a real dilemma, especially for FGCSs who identify as low-income students. (Alvarez & Marshall, 2018; Ishitani, 2006).

Although there has been an increase in the cost of higher education, students often rely on the combination of financial resources such as savings, parental contribution, employment income, work-study, scholarships, grants, and federal and private loans to help with paying for college (Ishitani, 2006; Schmeiser, Stoddard, & Urban, 2015). More importantly, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has served as an avenue for students' access to many different types of need-based aid, which is a gateway to billions of dollars in federal grants and loans (Furquim et al., 2017; Ishitani, 2006). In order for FAFSA to estimate financial need and eligibility for students, it requires information on family income, assets, and household size among other financial information (Furquim et al., 2017). Nevertheless, despite the critical role that FAFSA plays in students receiving student financial aid, many low-income students, especially those who identify as first-generation do not take the time to complete the application (King, 2004). Not filling out the FAFSA application has had implications for FGCSs.

King (2004) and Kofoed (2017) denoted that when FGCSs and those with low-income background fail to complete the FAFSA application, they are faced with higher college costs by not making themselves eligible to receive significant amounts of financial aid. Sometimes not filling out the FAFSA leads to students not enrolling in college all together, which contributes to the lower college enrollment rates for FGCSs (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012). In fact, Kofoed (2017) discovered that close to 20% of students who were eligible to attend college and came from families earning less than \$50,000 a year did not complete their FAFSA application form. Other researchers have argued that the complexity of financial aid system combined with the lack of clarity on aid eligibility have put low-income and FGCSs at a major disadvantage

(Avery & Kane, 2004; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2006; Dynarski & Wiederspan, 2012). This is due to the lack of knowledge on the availability of financial aid and the processes of obtaining it, and not having a support system at home that could guide them through the financial aid system; all resulting in FGCSs needing help when completing the FAFSA form (Avery & Kane, 2004; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2006; Dynarski & Wiederspan, 2012; Perna 2015). However, FAFSA continues to play a critical factor in providing financial assistance to FGCSs.

As FGCSs enter college, they do not have the adequate information or knowledge on the financial aid process, which results in many of them facing financial hardships, even though they are eligible for financial aid (Engle et al., 2006). Having access to higher earnings and financial resources is linked to higher educational attainment (Forquim et al., 2017; Goldin & Katz, 2007). On the other hand, working more hours to either pay for college or meeting the needs of family's financial needs have been positively associated with FGCSs having poor academic performance and a higher attrition rate (Furquim et al., 2017). In a study that was done by Eitel and Martin (2009), it was reported 50% of FGCSs said that due to financial constraints, they were either *likely* or *very likely* to withdraw from their classes or the institution. Moreover, FGCSs specified being overwhelmed by not only being responsible for taking care of their family's financial needs and paying for college, which brings a great amount of emotional burden on them, but also simultaneously trying to navigate the social and academic demands of college without the same resources, knowledge, and skills as their continuing-generation college students (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016).

As shared earlier, when FGCSs enroll in college, they have a difficult time navigating through college due to various challenges they face. These hurdles include not being academically prepared to perform well, having lower standardized test scores, enrolling in more remedial courses, living off campus and not participating in any campus activities, not having as much access to financial resources, applying for more federal loans, and lacking overall student engagement on campus (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2006; Moschetti & Hudely, 2015; Pratt et al., 2017; Schmeiser et al., 2015). These issues are even more prevalent for students of color, specifically, Black men. Aside from these issues, high school to college transition has been even more difficult for Black men due to their race and social class, which has made their social and academic adjustment and sense of belonging on college more difficult (Inkelas et al., 2007; Ishitani, 2006; Kim & Sax, 2009; Wilkins, 2014).

Young individuals who come from a disadvantaged race and social class backgrounds experience many hurdles in relation to college transition (Aries & Sider, 2005; Wilkins, 2014). The disparities in race and class in academic and social environment are important issues for educational success, social mobility, and personal well-being of FGCSs (Wilkins, 2014). Social mobility in higher education requires the right fit between students and their social and educational settings (Wilkins, 2014). Furthermore, it requires students making connections with their peers, and obtaining social and cultural capital for a better life post-collegiate era (Wilkins, 2014). When students experience any major life changing events such as going to college, they go through a process of transition and adjustment (Fischer, 2007). That transition and adjustment period is not always easy for FGCSs, especially, Black undergraduate male

students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). When Black men enter college, they are faced with various challenges and setbacks that have led them toward dropping out of college (Fischer, 2007; Hall 2017). The next section focused on Black men in higher education and their overall college experiences at PWIs.

Black Students in Higher Education

Influencing students, especially ethnic/racial minorities who identify as first-generation to attend college begins during the early phases of their educational experience (Strayhorn, 2017). Teacher expectation has been identified as one of the important factors that influence the experiences of Black male youth in K-12 urban schools (Strayhorn, 2017). Polite and Davis (1999) conducted a study on 115 high school Black males; the findings indicated that teachers and guidance counselors did not direct or inform Black male youth toward any college preparatory opportunities such as summer camps, advanced math classes, or AP courses (Strayhorn, 2017).

Since 2000, the college enrollment rate has increased and factors such as changes in labor markets and the economy have contributed to the increase in enrollment rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). College enrollment is defined as the percentage of young adults between the ages of 18-24-year-old who are enrolled in 2-year or 4-year undergraduate or graduate institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). From 2000-2016, the enrollment rate for Black students increased by 5% (31%-36%), which was 2% higher than White enrollment rate (39%-41%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Additionally, the enrollment rate for young Black men increased from 25%-33% from 2000-2016 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Strayhorn (2017) indicated that undergraduate racial/ethnic minorities are

increasingly representing a portion of undergraduate students that enroll in public universities. In fact, Black students make up 2 million of over 21 million full-time and part-time undergraduate students who attend more than 4,300 higher education institutions, majority of them being public institutions (Strayhorn, 2017).

The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2013) reported only 50% of Black men graduating from high school. However, the high school graduation rate in 2016 increased by 16% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Despite the high school graduation rate reaching 76% in 2016, that percentage remains below the national average of high school graduation rate for all students, which stands at of 84% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). When comparing Black men to their White counterparts, Black men are underrepresented at many higher education institutions and maintain a low academic achievement (Hall, 2017). For instance, Harper (2012) reported a six-year graduation rate for Black men who attend public colleges and universities situates at 33.3% compared to 48.1% for all students. In relations to postsecondary education, half of Black men who graduate from high school attended a 2-year community college and few of them attended a 4-year institution (Strayhorn, 2017). However, two-thirds of Black men who begin their journey at a 4-year institution drop out, making their attrition rate the highest among all sexes and races (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). In order to better understand why Black undergraduate male students, have the highest attrition rate among all sexes and races, it is salient to learn about their collegiate and societal experiences.

Experiences of Black Men in Higher Education

Black students' enrollment in higher education institutions have ascended over the past few decades; however, they still have the lowest retention and graduation rates among their counterparts (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Hall, 2017; Harper, 2013a). Because of that, higher education research on Black men continues to revolve around issues of access, retention, persistence, and graduation (Fleming, 1984; Flowers, 2006; Kim & Hargrove, 2013, Strayhorn, 2017; Wood, 2013). When investigating the experiences of Black men in higher education, it is important to examine *how* Black men experience college and *what* they experience while in college because they both effect the persistence and success of Black men in higher education (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Additionally, there are various factors that not only challenged the educational trajectory of Black men, but also impacted their retention, persistence, and their overall collegiate experience in higher education (Broom and Davis, 2017). One of the factors that impact Black men college experience is their attendance at PWIs.

Fleming (1984) and Harper (2013b) analyzed the overall experiences of Black men attending PWIs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Various researchers have discussed in length that African American men find PWIs less inviting, not as supportive, and less sympathetic toward their needs (Fleming, 1984; Hall, 2017; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). For example, Jagers and Iverson (2012), Cuyjet (2006), and Hall (2001) conveyed that behaviors of racism, isolation, and alienation at PWIs have created great challenges for Black men. Racism has been identified as one of the main impediments to the success of Black students, especially, Black men at PWIs (Robertson & Mason, 2008). When Black men enroll in higher education institutions, they expect to

be treated fairly and equally; however, too often, PWIs can be a hostile environment for them (Robertson & Mason, 2008; Suarez-Balcazar, Orellan-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003). The feeling of racial prejudice has led to Black men experiencing social alienation, which can create a negative college experience for them (Fleming, 1984; Flowers, 2006). The negative college experience often results in stress, anxiety, and poor academic performance (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003).

In the 1960s, the incidents of violence and rejections took place in many different campuses in the South as well as other locations in the United States (Sinanan, 2016). When Black students attended PWIs during the 1960s and 1970s, they experienced a great deal of hostility as well as individual and institutional racism (Allen, 2003; Cuyjet, 2006). That trend continues today even more through Black students experiencing microaggressions such as nonverbal and verbal insults, and intentional or unintentional environmental slights, which leads to the high attrition rates of Black men in colleges (Sinanan, 2016). Bridges (2011) further argued that having strong sense of self-awareness and self-understanding is crucial for Black men at PWIs. Self-awareness is about having an understanding of who one is as well as the history of African American in higher education and the society at large (Bridges, 2011).

These feelings of isolation and disengagement force Black men to seek academic and social support from their micro-communities such as Black faculty mentors, peers of the same race, mentoring programs, and various Black male initiatives that are geared toward supporting Black men and other men of color (Brooms, 2017; Brooms, 2018a; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2009b). In fact, due to the lowest six-year graduation percentage of Black (36%) and Latino men (47%), college campuses were called out to

do more to increase the graduation rates of those student populations (Pendakur & Harper, 2016). A response to this call was the creation of different programs designed to work specifically with male students of color. In February 2014, an initiative backed by the White House, called “My Brother’s Keeper” was announced by President Barack Obama to address the issues of persistent and opportunity gaps of boys and young black men of color (Pendakur & Harper, 2016; Wood & Newman, 2017). This initiative was supported and funded by private organizations and foundations to further create best practices for improving the success of boys and men of color in the educational system, the criminal justice system, and the work environment (Brooms 2018; Wood & Newman, 2017).

Experiences of Black Men in Society

When evaluating the barriers of educating Black men in the United States, Jenkins (2006) discussed that Black men are often treated with a “niggardly” regard, which place them at the bottom of the society, and forces them to experience a great deal of underachievement in every aspects of life. Black men experiencing rejection or hostility from their White counterparts in their academic and social settings have led to disengagement from their predominantly White campus community (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Moreover, there are various synonyms associated with Black men in the Society. Black men are often associated with criminals and been labeled as “brutes”, “thugs”, “suspects”, or “persons of interest” by law enforcement agencies (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Moreover, other factors such as racial profiling, heavy involvement in the criminal justice system, mass incarceration, poverty, and high unemployment rates have negatively impacted the lives of Black men (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Smith et al., 2007).

Experiences of discrimination, isolation, exhaustion, alienation, and race related stressors have made navigating college more challenging for Black men (Brooms, 2018; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2009b). James and Lewis (2014) and Mutua (2006a) further reported that their Blackness or their race coupled with their identity reveals itself in gendered racism as they are stereotyped, policed, and profiled at PWIs. For instance, in a study that was done by Wood (2014), outside of lack of proficiency in reading negatively impacting the seriousness of students' educational endeavors, he also discovered that Black men's lack of engagement was because of their lowered educational expectations, faculty dissonance, and abrasiveness from their White counterparts in classroom settings. It is important to note that these issues that Black men are faced with have created a negative assumption in that Black men do not care about their education (Wood, 2014). That is why it is essential for institutions to provide their faculty, staff, and administrators with necessary educational training sessions and workshops so that they can help the marginalized student populations with overcoming stigmas and challenges and creating a more inclusive learning environment for Black men.

Challenges of Black Men at Predominantly White Institutions

Faculty-student engagement. Race-related stressors, racial battles, and academic and social isolation have impacted the experiences of Black men at PWIs (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2009b). These problematic experiences have resulted in Black students' academic and social isolation, poor social integration, and lack of institutional responsibility towards creating a welcoming learning environment for Black students (Cuyjet, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper, 2013a; Museus, 2008; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, &

Strayhorn, 2014). Another critical issue that has impacted the persistence rate of African American students includes being negatively labeled (Hall, 2017). In one study, Strayhorn (2008b) reported that false and negative labels attached to Black men made it more difficult for them to connect with a faculty or staff for support reasons. False or negative perceptions, lack of “fitting in”, and other barriers may have a negative impact on Black students’ scholastic and co-curricular engagement within the university (Hall, 2017).

Despite the fact that many Black students attend PWIs, a considerable number of Black students attend and graduate from HBCUs (Robertson & Chaney; 2017; Rogers & Summers, 2008). HBCUs account for only 3% of higher education institutions in the United States, yet they graduate approximately about 20% of undergraduate African American students (Robertson & Chaney; 2017). The discrepancies in graduation rate of Black students, especially Black men at PWIs and HBCUs hints at classroom environment at PWIs (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Researchers have found that the academic success of Black men is enhanced when course content is directly related to their interests and concerns (Bush and Bush, 2010; Robertson, 2012; Thompson and Louque, 2005). In other words, the content of the courses should focus on important topics and discussion around issues of racism and discrimination (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Aside from the course content, the student-faculty relationship is also an important factor to the success of Black men at PWIs.

Various researchers have discussed the importance of African American students, particularly, Black men’s relationship with professors (Ancis et al., 2000; Andriano, 2012; Edelin-Freeman, 2004;). For instance, in one study, students of color discussed

experiencing prejudice attitudes of faculty as well discriminatory experiences in the classroom settings, whereas White students did not experience any of those behaviors (Ancis et al., 2000). Furthermore, Black male students who connect with White faculty and foster good relationships with them are more likely to be satisfied with their academic experiences at PWIs (Robertson & Mason, 2008). Apart from teaching, faculty members play a significant role in higher education. Andriano (2012) extended their conversation by stating that the role of faculty is to promote positive engagement practices and learning for students. Student-faculty relationships not only impact the classroom experiences of students, but it also positively affects student learning (Andriano, 2012; Tinto, 1993). Fischer (2007) discovered that all African American students who have academic connections with their faculty experience a great level satisfaction and persistence.

When students receive support from faculty, they have a better academic performance. Baker (2013) suggested that faculty support is a fundamental determinant of overall satisfaction of Black college students, where it is not a critical element to the overall satisfaction of White students. Additionally, research by Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, Von Hippel, and Learner (1998) suggested that student-faculty relationship is helpful for Black students and other students of color who are faced with barriers when navigating through their college experiences. In order to help Black students to have a more positive experience at PWIs, it is salient to have the availability of faculty of color (Baker, 2013). Having faculty of color connecting with students of color, especially, Black men will help them to partake in faculty initiatives such as faculty-mentoring program, which will aid them with enhancing their college self-efficacy and academic

goals (Baker 2013). However, sometimes Black faculty members can have a negative influence on Black students at PWIs.

Too often, Black teacher trainees at HBCUs believed that it was their responsibility and spiritual obligation to empower the Black community by making students' academic, social, and psychological development their main priority (Foster, 1993). Guiffrida (2005a) reported that Black students at PWIs share the same expectations in that faculty will continue to go above and beyond their expectations to help Black students with their emotional and psychological development. Nonetheless, Black student participants in Guiffrida's (2005a) study felt as though due to the notion of Black faculty going above and beyond their obligations, they were holding Black students to a higher academic standard. Faculty held those students accountable by monitoring their academic progress and pushed them beyond their limitations in their academic work (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010).

Some students perceived this as another way of faculty members being student-centered by going above their obligations to help students succeed (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). However, to the rest of Black students, raising the bar due to their racial/ethnic background made the course more challenging for them, and further reinforced the stigma that they should be treated differently compared to their White peers (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Despite the fact that the academic climate and student-faculty relationships are some of the contributing factors to the success of Black men at PWIs, researchers have recognized that campus involvement also enhances the retention and persistent rate of Black male students (Baker, 2013; Guiffrida, 2004).

Campus involvement. Being involved in student clubs and organizations is associated with academic achievement and persistence (Guiffrida, 2004). Astin's (1984) theory of student development indicated that when students are involved in the life of the university through participating in student organizations, they are more likely to learn, more satisfied with their overall college experiences, and eventually reach graduation. Astin defines involvement as "The amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to academic experience" (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016, pp. 34). In other words, Astin believed that students who engage in various aspects of college life tend to have a higher college success rate than students who do not participate in any clubs or organizations (Fischer, 2007). He referred to this model as "input-process-output" model, which means through their level of commitment and engagement; students' college experience is proportional to students' learning and development (Fischer, 2007).

Researchers have argued that student involvement on campus is particularly critical in the retention of students of color who attend PWIs (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Tatum, 1999). Hawkins & Larabee (2009) put an emphasis on students of color involvement in ethnic clubs and organizations by stating that when students of color enroll in PWIs, they are pressured to coexist with the mainstream organizations and perceive traditionally White student organizations as socially exclusive. In two different qualitative studies on students of color done by Murguia, Padilla, and Pavel (1991) and Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, and Trevino (1997), they discovered that being involved in ethnic/racial student organizations permitted students of color to bridge the cultural gap between home and their institution. Guiffrida (2003) also

found that when Black students become engaged in African American organizations, they have an easier time being socially integrated at PWIs. When students of color, particularly Black students, are not involved with ethnic clubs and organizations, they tend to have a difficult time identifying and interacting with students who do not identify as students of color (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009). This has led to students of color experiencing isolation and alienation, which then resulted in their departure from PWIs (Eimers, 2001).

Considering the fact that researchers have linked involvement in Black student organizations with student academic achievement and persistence, other studies have argued that engagement in African American clubs and organizations at PWIs is not positively correlated with Black student retention or academic achievement (Fries-Britt, 1995; Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995; McCauley, 1988; Nora, Cabrera, & Pascarella, 1996). In a qualitative study, Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) compared the experiences of 15 Black students who attended a PWI compared to 19 African American students who attended an HBCU. The conclusion of the study reported that the less Black students are involved with social opportunities at PWIs, the more focused they are on their academics (Fries-Britt and Turner, 2002). Overall, Black students being involved with Black student clubs and organizations have had valuable assets to them attending PWIs because it provided them with leadership opportunities, cultural connections and networks, and being integrated in PWIs (Guiffrida, 2003; Hawkins & Larabee, 2009). Nonetheless, there are conflicting research that denotes African American student organizations separate students from their academic focus and creates an isolation from the larger student population (Guiffrida, 2003).

Another disadvantage of having Black students club and organization is the amount of time Black students devote to their involvement. In Guiffrida's (2003) study, numerous students reported that they were too involved in Black student organizations, which prevented them from spending more time on their studies and academic achievements. Students further indicated that they sacrificed a great amount of time to meet the needs and responsibilities of their student organization and they displayed a greater physical and psychological investment into college life (Guiffrida, 2003). Due to their overinvestment and engagement to college life, many of them were in danger of being academically dismissed (Guiffrida, 2003). Although, this finding directly contradicted Astin's (1984) involvement theory, which proposed the more students are involved on campus, the more likely they are to learn and be retained, it supported Tinto's (1993) social and academic integration theory, which suggested that if students do not have an equal balance between their social and academic involvement, they would experience a higher attrition rate. Additionally, Guiffrida's (2003) study supported Tinto's (1993) student departure theory and the impact of organizational involvement on retention. Tinto (1993) denoted that those students who are active in various clubs and organizations possess values and patterns that are closely related to the institution's values and will be more likely to persist at the institution. Aside from campus involvement, Black men also have to overcome various identity development issues.

Identity development. During the early stages of child development, children seek to develop their own identity through various characteristics such as personality, physical attributes, ethnic orientation, and other important traits (Harper, 2007). As they advance and grow into their adolescence years and beyond, their meaning of their identity

evolves and they begin to examine their life goals, belief system, and individual purpose (Harper, 2007). Although, everyone goes through their own identity exploration process, that process is different for students of color compared to their White peers. When it relates to college men and their identity development, they are pressured to conform to normative constructive and stereotypically masculine behavior (Harris III & Lester, 2009). Men are expected to bypass their emotions, excel in sports, and pursue sexual encounters with women (Harris III & Lester, 2009). Furthermore, important figures in their lives such as parents and other male peers often discourage men to behave outside of the normative boundaries that are created for men (Harris III & Lester, 2009). For example, Harper (2004) noted, “No father wants his son to grow up being a ‘pussy,’ ‘sissy,’ ‘punk’ or ‘softy’ – terms commonly associated with boys who fail to live up to the traditional standards of masculinity in America” (p.92). The conflict in men’s gender role has impacted their campus engagement and brought concerns to postsecondary educators.

Several reports have displayed a discrepancy between men’s and women’s engagement in educational purposeful activities. For instance, the annual assessment of campus-based community engagement reported that 35% of male student participants were engaged in service activities (Salgado, 2003). Additionally, women in general have expressed greater interest in participating in community-service programs or events than their male counterparts (Astin & Sax, 1998). In another study by Sax and Harper (2007), gender differences in college outcome was investigated. The report from this study implied that women had greater interest and orientation toward helping others, influencing social values, and working in the greater community, whereas their male

peers reported being more concerned with making money, obtaining recognition, and having power or authority over others (Sax & Harper, 2007). The findings of Sax and Harper (2007) study conflicted with the findings of Brooms's (2018a) study on Black men initiatives. The men participants in Brooms's (2018a) study reported that by partaking in Black men initiatives, students were connected to campus and the local community, participated in various community service events, and were able to develop a sense of self and a sense of group consciousness and identity.

Other studies have noted that race and gender have made navigating college more stressful for Black men at PWIs and have negatively impacted their social relations (Bridges, 2011; Mutua, 2006b; Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004). For example, Bridges (2011) reported that Black men experience many sociocultural, academic, and negative stressors that affect their identity development and relationships. Mutua (2006b) argued that Black men continuously face racism, which diminishes any type of opportunities that may come to them because they belong to an oppressed community. Lastly, Smiley and Fakunle (2016) concluded that the synonymous conjecture of Blackness within the criminal justice system in the United States has created a negative image of Black males, which has led to law enforcement officials labeling Black men as "suspects" or "person of interest." Moreover, murder cases of various Black men such as Travon Martin, Eric Gardner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and a list of many others have served as a testimony to the challenges that Black men face in society (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

Another critical issue that is associated with college men is alcohol abuse (Harris III & Lester, 2009). Capraro (2000) reported that college men overconsume alcohol for

reasons such as peer pressure, taking risks, and coping with stress. Men's overconsumption of alcohol has been associated with confirming to stereotypes expectations of masculine expressions (Courtenay, 2004; Sabo, 2005). There are various outcomes that occur from consumption of alcohol from men such as drunk driving, physical violence, sexual assault, risky and unprotected sex, and accidental injuries (Harris III & Lester, 2009). In fact, one in five college women are sexually assaulted by another man (Bureau of Justice, 2016). Some of the reasons why men commit sexual assaults are the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs, viewing such a harmful behavior as acceptable, confirming to the cultural norm that men possess dominance and aggression toward women, and the lack of knowledge on how sexual assault impact victims (Harris III & Lester, 2009). All these gender-related conflicts that revolves around men in college have made it more difficult for men, especially Black men, to have a positive college adjustment and transition. Furthermore, these behaviors have resulted in Black men in higher education to have a negative social and academic college experience, which leads to them dropping out of college (Harris III & Lester, 2009).

Summary

An extensive amount of research has been done on FGCSs and factors that contributed to their successful college experience, transition, persistence, and graduation (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Inkelas et al., 2007; Ishitani, 2006; Longwell-Grace et al., 2016; Pike and Kuh; 2005). Other researchers have also studied Black men experiences at PWIs, challenges they face, and how those roadblocks have affected their persistence, sense of belonging, social and academic integration, and graduation rate (Guiffrida, 2004; Harper 2013a; Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008b). When coupling FGCSs and

Black men as one population (FGBM), they experience more barriers and uphill battles than other student populations. To address their sense of belonging and social and academic needs, researchers have developed many different theoretical concepts. Two of those theoretical frameworks are Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) College Students' Sense of Belonging and Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition. In the next section, I discussed both theories more in depth in an attempt to identify causes and means of overcoming these hurdles.

Theoretical Framework

In higher education, student performance is evaluated by their GPA and the number of credit hours they complete. However, student performance in the classroom is not only impacted by the number of hours they spend studying, but also how well they adjust and transition to their campus environment. For first-generation Black men (FGBM) attending PWIs, the college adjustment and transition is more difficult than their White continuing-generation college students. FGBM are affected by lack family engagement, campus involvement, poor student-faculty relationship, peer-to-peer support, financial barriers, lack academic preparedness, sense of belonging on campus, hostile campus climate, racial identity, and racism among many others (Ancis et al., 2000; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2013a; Schwartz et al., 2018; Strayhorn, 2012). Although attending secondary education is compulsory, enrolling in higher education is voluntary; for those who do attend, there are a plethora of reasons why students either choose or are forced to withdraw from the institution (McCubbin 2003). Student attrition has been recognized as one of the major issues facing higher education institutions (Aljohani, 2016; McCubbin, 2003). Due to the significance of the attrition issue, there are

numbers of theoretical models that have been developed to provide resolution to this issue. One of those theories is Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) College Students' Sense of Belonging.

Sense of Belonging

Having one believe in the ability to successfully complete a particular course of action does not guarantee persistence (Tinto, 2017b). What is necessary is having the individual being included in the community of faculty, staff, and other students who value their participation and making the students feel that they matter and belong to a community (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008a). When students feel valued and appreciated, they experience a sense of commitment, which brings the individual and the members of the community together, even when both parties experience adversities (Tinto, 2017ab). That is why being engaged in the campus community is essential to the persistence of students. Being more engaged with others is better than being less engaged because students equate engagement with sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 2017a).

Students' sense of belonging derives from the broader campus climate and their ongoing daily interactions with different students, faculty, staff, and administrators on campus (Hurtado & Punjuan 2005; Tinto, 2017b). A sense of belonging or lack thereof is a critical factor in student withdrawal from their institution (O'Keeffe, 2013). Sense of belonging is established when students share common interest with their peers in the same discipline, socio-cultural background, or the broader institutional climate (Tinto, 2017b). However, when students lack sense of belonging, their motivation to persist declines, which leads to them withdrawing from their institution (Tinto, 2017b). When

relating this to the students of color experiences, they endure great strains that can interfere with their college transition and integration as well as establishing a sense of belonging (Fries-Britt & Griffen, 2007).

Higher education institutions have established a positive sense of belonging for students through different methods. They have ensured that the make of faculty, staff, and administration is represented of their diverse student population, which has helped students to feel connected to the campus climate and classroom environment (Tinto, 2017a). Additionally, institutions have promoted the concept of sense of belonging through promoting different activities around the academic and social needs of students (Tinto, 2017a). For instance, in the academic milieu, a sense of belonging can be accomplished through a form of cohort programs, learning communities within residence halls, and through the utilization of diverse and effective pedagogical practices (Tinto, 2017a). On the other hand, under the social realm, institutions have provided students with opportunities to be engaged with diverse social groups and organizations that permit students to discover their own small subcommunities within a larger community (Tinto, 2017a). These subcommunities have mandated students to experience learning collectively, which essentially creates a sense of belonging amongst them.

Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging

Having a sense of belonging with students on a college campus is one of the key components of one's college experience (Strayhorn, 2012). Not only can sense of belonging impact the academic achievement of students, but it can also assist with students' retention and graduation rates (Strayhorn, 2012). According to Strayhorn (2012), sense of belonging refers to "Student's 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 a group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)” (p.3). Strayhorn (2012) used Maslow’s hierarchy of need’s theory, which described belongingness as a basic human motivation; as a result, people have a desire to discover their need to belong. Maslow also indicated that once individual’s physiological and safety needs are met, then having the need to belong emerges (Strayhorn, 2012).

There are other definitions on belonging that is important to highlight. Erickson (1987) defined belonging as basis of formal and informal organizations where people participate in activities in order to belong to a group. Yuval-Davis (2006) defined belonging through three different levels: social positions, identification processes, emotional bonds, and ethical and political values; belonging to policies and ways in which they integrate into various plans and projects of people who live in a society; and belonging in political, cultural, social, and religious projects. Bagnall (2009) defined belonging as a form of social organization and association with various communities that are experienced by people. Osterman (2000) introduced belonging as having members feeling mattered to another member or to a group as a whole while having a shared faith between members in order to be committed to one another. For the purposes of this research, I will be using Strayhorn’s definition of belonging, which is framed as “A basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, when discussing college, sense of belonging focuses on the social support of students on campus, having a sense of connectedness, being valued and cared about,

having a sense of acceptance, respect, and being important to a campus community or others on campus (Strayhorn, 2012).

Sense of belonging has served as a pathway to academic achievement, retention, and persistence to degree attainment (Strayhorn, 2008a). Additionally, when students are socially and academically engaged, they tend to have a stronger sense of belonging on campus (Strayhorn, 2012). When students are engaged with others, they have a more frequent interaction with one another, foster meaningful relationships and friendships; as a result, they feel more supported and experience a positive college experience (Strayhorn, 2012). All of these factors have contributed to students' commitment to their achievement, connections, and ultimately retention (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2012) further stated that failure to having a sense of belonging lead to lack of interest or engagement in normal life activities. Moreover, students have various needs; if their needs are not met, their motivation is diminished, their developmental skills are decreased, their academic performance is negatively impacted, and they are not able to sustain a high academic engagement and commitment to their environment (Strayhorn, 2012). A sense of belonging on campus has further implications for students' integration into college campus. As a result of this, one of the most utilized theories that addresses student integration is Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition.

Tinto's Student Integration Model of Attrition

Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition was created to provide an explanation of factors that influence an individual's decision to withdraw from a college or university and how those factors and processes produce attrition (McCubban, 2003). In a broad sense, integration is a term that is utilized to define developments of people in

diverse elements such as social environments, systems, communities, or other units (Beresneviciute, 2003). Tinto modeled his theory after Durkheim's theory of suicide (Tinto, 1993). According to Durkheim, suicide takes place due to the lack of an individual's social and intellectual integration into the society (Durkheim, 1951). Additionally, Durkheim (1951) argued that having an adequate social support network and a great amount of moral integration will diminish the possibility of individuals committing suicide. To that point, Tinto drew similarities between individuals committing suicide due to the lack of integration into the society and students dropping out of college due to the lack of social and intellectual integration into higher education institutions (Aljohani, 2016; McCubbin, 2003). Tinto further discussed ways in which students may choose to leave college. He insisted that some of the behaviors that contribute to the attrition issue were academic failure, voluntary withdraw, permanent withdraw, temporary dropout, and transfer (Aljohani, 2016; McCubbin, 2003).

Tinto (1993) utilized Van Gennepe's (1960) study on rites of passage in tribal societies from the social anthropology's perspective. Van Gennepe's theory focused on three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation; Tinto (1993) modeled his theory after the concept of rite of passage to explain "The longitudinal process of student persistence in college" (p. 94). Tinto argued that in the separation phase, in order for students to embrace the norms and behaviors of the new communities, they ought to remove themselves from their old communities (Tinto, 1993). In the second phase, college students transition towards the latter stage of incorporation of their new community (Tinto, 1993). The third stage focused on students successfully disconnecting

themselves from the norms and behavior of their previous communities, and fully integrate into the new societies of their college (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's student integration model is based on the degree of fit between the student and the institutional environment (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's model indicated that students enroll in college with a different level of academic preparation and characteristics (Tinto, 1993). When students enter college, they create a different level of integration in the academic system of the institution that relates to the academic progress and performance; he referred to this as the academic integration (Tinto, 1993). Academic integration is defined by the vitality, vigor, the energy of the classroom, effective study habits by students, faculty-student contact outside of the classroom, academic support services, and impactful faculty advisement (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Additionally, Tinto insisted that students develop a diverse level of integration into the social system of the university, which includes, formal, semi-formal, and informal peer-to-peer interaction; he defined this as social integration (Tinto, 1993). Factors that are associated with social integration are effective friendship with peers, being involved in campus activities, clubs and organizations, and promoting respect, understanding, and communication among all races and ethnic groups, which is known as racial harmony (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

Tinto proposed that if students have positive academic and social integration into college, they are more committed and motivated to persist in their degree attainment (McCubbin, 2003; Tinto, 1993). However, when there is a great level of integration in one system, the other system tends to be impacted negatively (McCubbin, 2003; Tinto, 1993). In other words, if students are too involved in their social communities, their

academic performance would suffer, and if they spend a great deal of time on their academics, they would have very little time to spend on their social life (McCubbin, 2003). However, when students establish an equal balance between their intellectual resources and their social and external environments, they are able to establish a sense of belonging on campus and have subsequent interactions with internal and external members of the university and community (Tinto, 1993).

Limitations with Tinto's Student Integration Model

Tinto's Student Integration Model is one of the many theories that researchers have utilized to address the issues around student retention and persistence (Deil-Amen, 2011; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; & Guiffrida, 2006). However, Tinto's theory has been critiqued and criticized by other researchers regarding all students must go through the same assimilation process in order to be successful. Baker (2013) highlighted the fact that Tinto's theory ignores the differences in race, class, and gender of students who are enrolled in college. Furthermore, he failed to adequately address the racial environment of the institution and the differences between the overall college experience of students of color at PWIs and White students (Baker, 2013; Guiffrida, 2005b). Steele (1997) argued that the academic performance of ethnic/racial groups may be impacted by campus racial environment, especially when they are stereotyped, which many African American students do experience (Steele, 1997).

Other researchers further criticized Tinto's theory. Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie (2009) argued that, "Students who are not traditional in terms of race/ethnicity, age, and full-time status, the assumption is that in order to succeed in college (i.e. to persist) students must become integrated into the college environment by abandoning

their history, heritage, and outside interest” (P. 415). The general overview of Tinto’s theory was that the student is integrated into a larger community and views him/herself as part of a larger group (Davidson & Wilson, 2013). If the larger group (the institution) is a prominent factor that determines retention, then the student aspects are not a top priority (Davidson & Wilson, 2013). Finally, Tierney (1992) stated that Tinto modeling his theory after Van Gennep’s (1960) transition theory and breaking away from home is not applicable to students of color because Van Gennep’s model was created to address cultural developmental progression as opposed to assimilation from one culture to another.

Despite the limitations of Tinto’s theory, his model has been one of the most utilized theories in the field of higher education. Tinto has revised and expanded his model over the last few decades to address the decision-making process regarding student goal commitment and attrition, the desire to align student expectations to the institutional mission, and the student transition through the college process (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2012). In his revised version of his model, Tinto (1993) recognized different student populations, which included African American students, low-income students, adult students, and transfer students (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2012). As a result, he presented three different influences that would predispose a student to persist in college: (a) a student’s background, (b) precollege education, and (c) personal attributes (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) measured a student’s background based on his/her socioeconomic status, educational expectations and aspirations, and parent’s education. Furthermore, he indicated that precollege education focuses on student’s academic preparedness and his/her social and academic ability (Tinto, 1993). Finally, personal

attributes included race and gender (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, Tinto, (2004) denoted that in order to positively impact and enhance undergraduate retention, higher education institutions must offer academic, social, and personal support services that are easily accessible.

Due to the fact that many Black men do not enter college with some of the predisposed factors that were identified by Tinto, it is important to discuss the caveat that was expressed by Tinto that when students increase their social and academic integration, they have a greater chance in succeeding in college, which compensates for a deficit predisposed experiences (Tinto, 1993). This study focused on the experiences of Black men who are first-generation at a PWI. Using Tinto's model helped to provide a conceptual framework for African American males' success with a focus on their persistence and graduation rates, including the impact of being integrated into college. To address the deficiencies of this model, I used Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) theory of sense of belonging. The student interaction with faculty, staff, and peers in addition to their engagement with various support service centers and activities can have a positive impact on students' sense of connection and belonging to the institution as well as navigating the campus culture through their integration into the campus community (Tinto, 2004).

Overall, when students enroll in college, they have a difficult time discovering their sense of belonging on campus due to their lack of social and academic integration into campus. Student sense of belonging and integration is even a greater challenge for first-generation students and Black men. Additionally, when students are not connected and integrated into campus, they feel isolated from their communities; as a result, they withdraw from their academic setting. The theoretical framework in this research used

Strayhorn's (2012) College Students' Sense of Belonging theory and Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition to address the persistence, retention, and academic achievement of FGBM in college. Tinto's theory addressed the academic and social integration of students in college; however, his theory did not account for students' race, ethnicity, and gender, which is one of the limitations of his model. Moreover, Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) theory of sense of belonging bridged that gap by addressing the sense of belonging of students of color, specifically, African American students.

The Relationship Between Sense of Belonging and Student Integration

Because sense of belonging and student integration model were used as the main theoretical frameworks in this study, it is salient to discuss the relationship between the two concepts. Sense of belonging has been characterized as having the need to interact with an individual or group of people; the interaction is perceived to be ongoing (Strayhorn, 2012). Through this interaction, students have experienced membership to various social, cultural, and academic organizations. This type of fit and interaction was linked to social and academic integration in a sense that integration is about the level of engagement in a formal and informal social and academic environment (Tinto, 1993). Through academic integration, students were able to foster quality and effective relationships with their professors, be engaged in activities that influenced higher level of academic performance and used class and group discussions as a way to improve learning (Tinto, 1993). This level of academic engagement and interaction enabled students to develop a sense of membership in the classroom environment and have a positive academic integration. Additionally, students used social integration to find their fit to a larger community. Social engagement refers to out-of-class experiences and participation

in extracurricular activities and peer-to-peer interactions (Tinto, 1993). When students are socially connected to the campus environment and their peers, they build trust with members of different subcommunities within their social milieus and discover their fit and sense of belonging within those subcommunities (Tinto, 1993; Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is a psychological factor that centers around people's subjective feelings of fit and membership to the institutions. When students are connected to their peers and faculty, they are able to focus on their academic and social common interests and discover their sense of fit and membership to their academic and social surroundings. This results in students experiencing a positive campus integration and sense of belonging to their larger community.

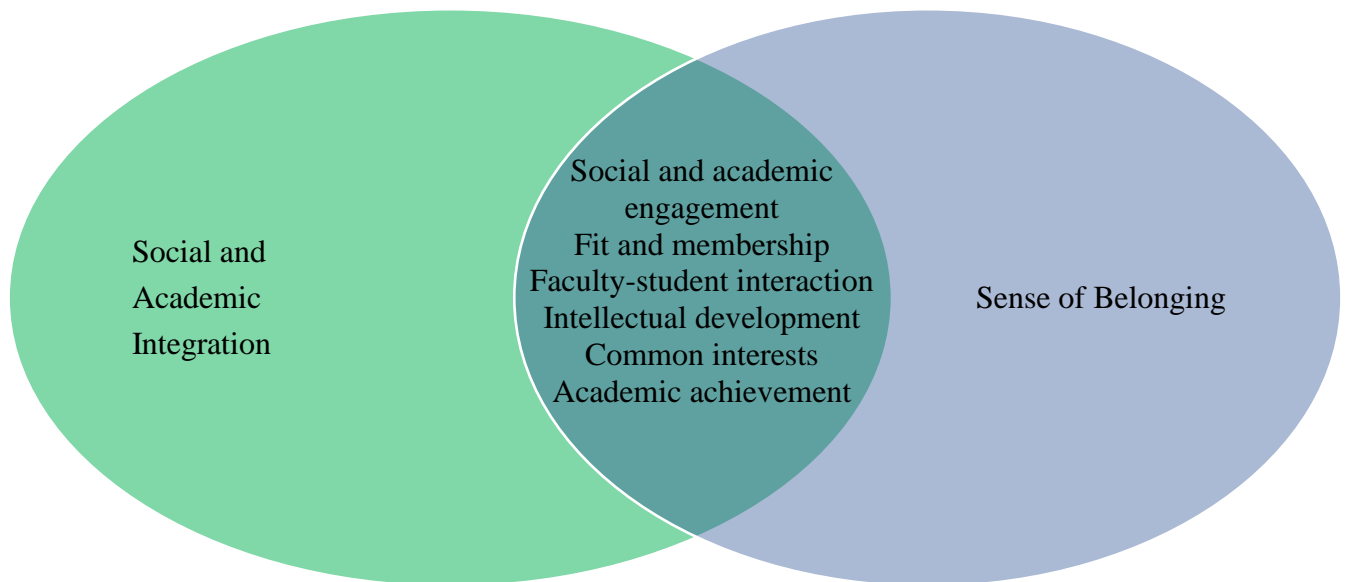


Figure 1. Persistence model for first-generation black men.

Summary

This chapter discussed first-generation college students (FGCSs), their backgrounds and characteristics, their college experiences, and various challenges that they face while in college. Additionally, a historical background of Black men in higher education was introduced followed by their experiences in higher education and society, and barriers they encounter at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). FGCSs enter college with very limited amount of knowledge on higher education system and the resources that are available to them. In large part, FGCSs have a lower persistence and graduation rates as well as lower scores and standardized assessment measures as a result of their characteristics compared to continuing-generation college students. When FGCSs enter college, they are forced to leave their community home and adapt into a new and unfamiliar environment and navigating that environment is a difficult task to accomplish, especially for Black male undergraduate students.

African American students, especially Black men have had an extensive history of being treated unequally, experiencing racism, being stereotyped, and associated with criminal law and justice system. When uniting these two populations as one, it is evident to see the uphill battles that first-generation Black men (FGBM) face at PWIs. FGBM have a difficult time integrating into the social and academic realms of college campus environment in addition to having a sense of belonging on campus. When students lack integration and sense of belonging, they feel isolated, alienated, and devalued, which results in their poor transition and persistence, and eventually their departure from their institution. To address FGBM's transition and persistence at PWIs, Strayhorn's College Students' Sense of Belonging and Tinto's Student Integration Model of Attrition theories

were utilized as theoretical frameworks in this study. In the next section, the methodological approach to this research was discussed.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The enrollment of first-generation college students (FGCSs) in public higher education institutions is continuously rising, yet FGCSs are still faced with many disadvantages when compared to continuing-generation college students (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). FGCSs feel overwhelmed by the college application process, experience a high level of financial and emotional burden, are unfamiliar with the college culture and navigating that culture, and are continuously adjusting their academic and social demands without having the equitable resources that continuing-generation college students possess (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). As a result of this, they feel overwhelmed, pressured, and isolated, which often leads to their withdraw from the institution (Ishitani, 2003; Castello et al., 2018). These barriers are even more prevalent for Black male undergraduate students who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs). In addition to these disadvantages, Black men in higher education also experience prejudice, racism, alienation, discrimination, and isolation (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper 2009a). Some of the factors that contribute to the disadvantages that Black men experience at PWIs include not feeling connected to the campus community, poor institutional climate, lack of faculty-student engagement and inclusive curriculums as well as campus involvement among others (Ancis et al., 2000; Bush & Bush 2010; Cuyjey, 2006; Harper, 2013b; Hawkins & Larbee, 2009). Although research has looked at the experiences of FGCSs and Black men at PWIs exclusively, very little research has been conducted on the intersections of both populations. Therefore, this qualitative study explored the sense of

belonging of first-generation Black men at a PWI and the way in which it impacted their academic and social integration.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was conducted to better understand the sense of belonging of first-generation Black men at a PWI and the way in which it impacted their social and academic integration. There were two overarching research questions followed by a sub-question that guided this study. Those questions were:

1. How do first-generation Black men describe their sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution?
2. How does sense of belonging impacts the academic and social integration of first-generation Black men at a predominantly White institution?
 - a. What campus resources and support systems do first-generation Black men perceive to be important to their sense of belonging and social and academic integration into campus?

Research Design

To better understand the lived experiences of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a PWI, I conducted a qualitative research. Qualitative research has been described as a type of research that seeks in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon in a broader context (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This type of research design provides depth, complexity, and integrates both a subjective and intersubjective stance when researching a phenomenon (Allan & Eatough, 2016). The approach that researchers take to conduct this type of research is natural and informative, which means it takes place in an uncontrolled environment and it is flexible rather than fixed (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman &

Rallis, 2017). Additionally, qualitative research involves a reflexive process that goes through various stages (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Reflexivity in qualitative research involves observation and reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Attia & Edge, 2017). This strategy is accomplished by researcher by stepping back to see what is going on and then stepping up for action (Attia & Edge, 2017). Reflexivity also includes interaction between colleagues/peers and the researcher to further explore the phenomenon from different perspectives (Attia & Edge, 2017).

In qualitative research, collecting and analyzing data, creating and modifying patterns that emerge from the interviews, developing or recreating the research questions, and addressing the validity threat all happens simultaneously and they all influence one another (Maxwell, 2013). The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the social world and establish new paradigms that can be helpful in the human condition (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative research is a method of research that seeks to explore and understand the meaning of people or different groups ascribed to social and human problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research uses various methods such as interviews, data collection, surveys, field notes, focus groups, or observations to contribute to the understanding of the social world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative research was an appropriate method of study for my research because it permitted me with an opportunity to fully emerge myself in the research, interact with FGBM, and really understand their experiences at a PWI. This research strategy granted me permission to access the rich information that my participants shared with me regarding their sense of belonging on campus and how it impacted their overall campus integration.

In the field of education, qualitative methodologies are acknowledged as valuable and credible strategies to lead empirical research (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016; Miller, Chan, & Farmer, 2018). Qualitative researchers work inductively to organize data and create themes, patterns, and categories and then work deductively to revisit and reinterpret data from existing themes to decide if more data needs to be collected in order to support each theme (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hayes & Singh, 2012). Throughout this entire process, the focus of the researcher is participants' meanings about the problem being researched (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process is an emergent process, which means some aspect of the research may shift or change (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This allows the researcher to repeat the data collection process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

It is important to note that the background of the researchers may shape the direction of the study based on their cultural, personal, and professional experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this situation, my constructivist world view influenced and shaped my assumptions and beliefs about experiences of FGBM; however, I bracketed my assumptions so that they did not influence my study. Finally, qualitative research provides an opportunity for multiple perspectives and factors that may impact the problem and obtain in-depth understanding of reasons for success or failure of an individual or group of people (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2013). By conducting a qualitative research, I gained valuable information regarding various factors or practices that aided FGBM to establish a sense of belonging on campus and the way in which sense of belonging impacted their social and academic integration.

The focus of this qualitative research study was to learn about the lived experiences of FGBM at a PWI. In particular, this study explored the understanding of sense of belonging of FGBM, how it affected their social and academic integration at a PWI, and how the intersection of these two concepts impacted their retention and graduation rates. This type of research methodology was appropriate for my study because it allowed for an engaging, extensive, rich, and meaningful conversation with my participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative research helped me to foster a strong relationship with my participants and provided me with knowledge about their lived experiences. A strategy of inquiry that helped me to better understand the lived experiences of my participants was the concept of phenomenology.

Strategy of Inquiry

Phenomenology research. In this research study, I used phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenology is considered a tradition in German philosophy and it focuses on lived experiences of people (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). When researchers are engaged in phenomenological research, they pay attention to the depth of the meaning of a specific experience, and they accomplish this through dialogue, interpretation, and critical self-reflection (Moustakas, 1994). Moreover, phenomenology research design accounts for the experiences of an individual or group of people, how they have experienced a specific phenomenon, and the way in which people have made sense of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon that is being studied in this research is the intersection of Black men being first-generation at a predominantly White institution.

Phenomenological inquiry is recognized as one of many educational research designs (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The philosophy behind qualitative research stems from phenomenology (as a philosophy), hermeneutics (interpretation given to objects), and existentialism (individuals defining their own life and making their own decisions) (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). This was important to my study because hermeneutics research approach allowed me to interpret a construct within a professional practice (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Additionally, through hermeneutics approach, I engaged in a dialogue between the text and participants and make meaning of the experiences of FGBM at a PWI (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). This process offered me the opportunity to go back and forth and maneuver myself in and out of the phenomenon that is being studied, which was the intersection of Black men being first-generation and to better understand their overall lived experiences at a PWI. A worldview of a phenomenologist is guided through a particular perspective during a specific time or event; therefore, phenomenology does not begin with a theory, rather, it begins with a phenomenon (Padilla-Diaz, 2015; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Research denoted that the phenomenological research design started in the United States mainly through theoretical descriptions (Frank, 1979). Furthermore, the concept of phenomenology was introduced in philosophy prior to the works by Georg Wilhelm and Fredrich Hegel and reappeared in research studies that was conducted by Max Weber (Frank, 1979). Frank (1979) reported that a phenomenological study functions in two different ways: (a) it provides a rich and complex set of authentic relationship in the participant's experience, even if their experience is modified or filtered through the researchers' reports and (b) it recognizes the historical events that takes place in

someone's life as a document, although making meaning of those historical events is dependent on the interpretation that is made by the researcher. In other words, a phenomenological study is "Based on assumptions only possibly shared by the subject and the investigator, since frequently life history texts attempt to make understood things that are difficult to communicate interpersonally as well as cross culturally" (Frank, 1979, p. 84). The way in which this was connected to my research was that experiences that were shared with me by participants were interpreted differently due to me making meaning of those experiences through a different set of lenses. This study was limited to the impact of sense of belonging on the social and academic integration of FGBM at a PWI. Therefore, in order to better understand that impact, it was important to understand the lived experiences of FGBM through a framework such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Rossmann and Rallis (2017) indicated that qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive, which means that researchers provide explanations for individuals and social actions. When conducting an IPA study, the researcher is fully involved with the process and the participants, mostly face-to-face (Rossmann & Rallis, 2017). This approach is called Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and it is designed to enable the researcher to investigate how participants are interpreting their own personal and social world in detail (Rossmann & Rallis, 2017; Smith & Osborn, 2009). IPA puts a great amount of emphasis on the involvement of the researcher in the process of research because it allows the investigator to enter the personal world of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2009). This means as much as participants are trying to make sense of their own

personal world, the researcher attempts to make sense of participants trying to make sense of their world and lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2009).

Lived experiences are used to define the overall structures of the phenomenon (De Chesnany, 2014). The structure of the phenomenon is the way in which a specific concept has developed and evolved over a span of time and each aspect of its development possesses a level of understanding and meaning. Lived experiences are the ways in which people choose to live their life in relations to a phenomenon (De Chesnany, 2014). Vagle (2014) used an example to distinguish between other qualitative data and lived experiences. Vagle (2014) indicated that some qualitative traditions describe how a tree looks. Some may describe part of the tree such as the bark, the branches, the leaves, or the color of the leaves (Vagle, 2014). However, phenomenologists are more concerned with how a person interprets and experiences the tree and make their own personal meaning of the tree (Vagle, 2014).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a type of qualitative approach that is gaining more attraction and it is used to further explore inquiries related to a phenomenon, which in this study was the intersection of Black men identifying as first-generation students at a PWI (Miller et al., 2018). Rooted in principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, IPA is widely used by researchers to further explore people's meaning making of certain experiences that are significant to them (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Idiographic begins with an in-depth and detailed analysis of an interview until a level of understanding has been reached (Allan & Eatough, 2016). Furthermore, idiography looks at particular as opposed to the general phenomena (Miller et al., 2018). Additionally, IPA provides a level of flexibility to

approach the expansion of a phenomenon and enables the freedom to explore context (Chan & Farmer, 2017; Miller et al., 2018; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is noted that through the use of hermeneutics approach, IPA aids with an in-depth understanding of an issue in relations to particular group of people, and further explores various nuances of the impact of context on relationships (Allan & Eatough, 2016). Using IPA in my research guided me toward unpacking the lived experiences of FGBM who are enrolled in a PWI and provided me with an opportunity to explore various factors that contributed to their persistence and graduation rates.

The application and utility of IPA has been mentioned in variety of research disciplines that includes counseling, counselor education, supervision, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender expansive, queer/questioning communities (Chan & Farmer, 2017), counselor education (Miller & Barrio Minton, 2016), and culture (Kastrani, Deliyanni-Kouimtzi, & Athanasiades, 2015). The reason why IPA was applicable to my study was because my research focused on the lived experiences of first-generation college students and Black men in tandem, which both populations are viewed as marginalized and underrepresented communities. There are also various key components of IPA. IPA is an inductive approach because participants are seen as experts of their experiences and are being asked to participate due to their expertise with a phenomenon that is being studied (Allan & Eatough, 2016). Additionally, researchers look to analyze data and see what is distinct; at the same time, attempt to understand what is being shared by participants (Allan & Eatough, 2016). Moreover, the analysis is interpretive, provides examples from data, and is credible to the participants, readers, and general public (Allan & Eatough, 2016). IPA aims to address the nature of what is being

(Groenewald, 2004). Interpretative phenomenology focuses on co-creating of interpretations among the researcher and participants due to humans having to share context, culture, and language (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Theoretical Foundations of IPA

The roots of interpretative phenomenological analysis are closely aligned with traditional phenomenology (Oxley, 2016). Generally, researchers who conduct a phenomenology research study examine the rich details of individuals' way of making meaning of a specific experience by looking at their own lived experiences that usually go unobserved or unexamined (Finlay, 2011). Finlay (2011) indicated that Edmund Husserl's (1970) transcendental phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic phenomenology research were two of the broadest categories in phenomenology research. Then, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) found out that IPA combined ideas from both categories, "Resulting in a method which is descriptive because it is concerned with how things appear and letting things speak for themselves, and interpretive because it recognizes there is no such thing as an uninterpreted phenomenon" (p. 8).

In traditional phenomenology research designs, there is a great emphasis on the essence of a specific issue perceived or experienced by select group of individuals; however, IPA scrutinizes the convergence and divergence of perceptions of people (Allan & Eatough, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). This means IPA is "Converge in being interested in examining how people think about what is happening to them but diverse in deciding how this thinking can best be studied" (Smith & Osborn, 2009, p. 54). Miller et al. (2018) denoted that in reference to IPA, researchers conduct an

analysis for each person that is involved in a study prior to comparing patterns across all cases. This action is taken because though participants may establish similar themes through their experiences of a phenomenon, they may interpret it radically different (Miller et al., 2018). This was applicable to the research that I conducted because although FGBM may have similar experiences at PWIs, interpreting those experiences looked different for each individual based on how they made meaning of the perceived phenomenon or experiences.

There is a theoretical commitment between IPA and the person in a cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical way and presumes a level of relationship between the way in which people speak to their experiences and their thinking and emotional state (Smith & Osborn, 2009). In the same token, IPA researchers understand that the chain of connection is complex due to people having a difficult time expressing their thoughts and emotions, which results in people not wanting to self-disclose much information about themselves (Smith & Osborn, 2009). This forces the researcher to make meaning of people's experiences, and mental and emotional states from what is being delivered to them. IPA studies highlight how people perceive and discuss events, objects, and experiences as opposed to describing a phenomenon that is predetermined, categorical, scientific, and conceptual (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This concept involves bracketing researcher's perceptions and assumptions and allowing participants to making meaning of their own perceived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Bracketing in Phenomenology Research

Understanding the lived experiences of participants cannot be conceived as a fixing of meaning, rather, it is about how the meaning of participants' lived experiences

are generated and transformed (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). In order to increase the rigor of phenomenology research project, Moustakas (1994) suggested that bracketing helps the study design methodically stay connected to the empirical research questions. Gearing (2004) introduced bracketing as a “Scientific process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon” (p. 1430). Bracketing is used for various researchers and scholars to diminish the risk factors that could affect that preconceptions that are associated with the research study (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Due to the close relationship between the researcher and the research study, bracketing can protect the researcher from the overall effects of examining materials or data that could be emotionally taxing or challenging (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Additionally, by using fundamental methodology of bracketing the researcher’s own lived experiences, the researcher is able to stay neutral and not have any influence on the participant’s understanding of the phenomenon (Chan et al., 2013). Aside from mitigating the adverse effects of the researcher endeavor, bracketing aids the researcher to reach a deeper level of reflection and understanding across all components of qualitative research such as, the research topic, population, interview questions, data collection and analysis, and reporting of findings (Moustakas, 1994).

There are different types of bracketing in phenomenology research design. One tactic of bracketing is writing memos throughout data collection and analysis phase (Cutcliffe, 2003). Memo writing encourages the researcher to examine and reflect on their own engagement with the data (Cutcliffe, 2003). Another method of bracketing is being engaged in interviews and being aware of one’s perceptions and biases (Rolls &

Relf, 2006). When interviews are conducted with non-managerial colleagues or research associates, the researcher is able to develop a supportive relationship with participants, which the relationship serves as interface amongst the research and the research data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Bracketing interviews provide the researcher with clarity and engagement with participants' experiences without having their own personal experiences interfere with making meaning of participants' lived experiences.

The last method of bracketing is reflexive journaling, which begins prior to defining the research questions (Ahern, 1999). Journal writing can improve researcher's ability to maintain a reflexive and neutral stance, address assumptions regarding participants' gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, personal value system, and the possibility of roles conflicts with participants (Hanson, 1994; Paterson and Groening, 1996). In this research study, I used the engagement method and reflexive practice as strategies to bracket my own personal biases and assumptions about the lived experiences of my participants. Additionally, I immersed myself in the interview process to better understand my participants' lived experiences and paradigms.

Research Site

I conducted this phenomenological study at South Jersey University (SJU), a four-year Carnegie-classified public research institution located in northeast in the United States. The student enrollment at this PWI is approximately at 15,000 undergraduate and 2,500 graduate and professional students. The university has 10 colleges and two medical schools, and offers 74 bachelor's degrees, 51 master's degrees, 4 doctoral degrees, 2 professional and 7 undergraduate certificates, and 38 post-baccalaureate certificates. Nearly 34% of the total student populations identify as students of color with the

breakdown of 10% Black/African American, 9.5% Hispanic/Latino/a, 5.8% Asian, 4.5% race/ethnicity unknown, 2.5% two or more races, 1.1% non-resident alien, 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Forbes, 2017). In addition, one-third (5,080) of the student population at SJU identifies as first-generation college students. Of that number, 57% identify as White, 17% Hispanic, 15% African American, 0.05% Asian, 0.04% unknown, and the rest are Native American, Native Hawaiian, and international students. Of 15% of African American students, 297 identify as men. The male and female enrollment percentage at SJU is 51% and 49%, respectively (Forbes, 2017).

To address the needs and challenges of FGCSs at SJU, a committee was formed and tasked with creating programs, workshops, and conferences that provided opportunities to educate faculty and staff on FCGSs, and further support and celebrate their efforts at SJU. The committee consists of various faculty and staff members, many of which identify as first-generation college graduates. The retention rate of all students at SJU stands at 85% and the six-year graduation rate stands at 70% (College Tuition Compare, 2017). However, when looking at the graduation rate by race and ethnicity, 6-year graduation rate for White students is at 72%, African American students is at 54%, Hispanic students is at 55%, Asian Students is at 74%, American Indian or Alaskan Native is at 67%, and for the unknow population is at 60%, making African American and Hispanic students the lowest among all races and ethnicities (Scholarship, 2017). Due to the fact that Black students have the lowest six-year graduation rate among all of their counterparts, my study played a significant role in investigating the lived experiences of first-generation Black men who are retained at SJU.

Research Participants

I used a purposeful sampling strategy in this study because I had a specific reason and purpose for selecting my participants (Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). My targeted population was first-generation Black men and I selected that population because nationally, the attrition rate of Black men is the highest among any other groups or populations (Strayhorn, 2008b). Furthermore, FGCSs face different set of challenges that make their college transition and persistence rate more difficult. Therefore, learning about the lived experiences of FGBM as one population informed my research questions about the impact of sense of belonging on their campus integration (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). In purposeful sampling, the settings, participants, and activities are selected intentionally to obtain information that is relevant to the researcher's questions and goals (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, the participants in this study were viewed as experts within the phenomenon that was studied, which was the intersection of Black men being first-generation and they produced rich experiences that provided the researcher with the best opportunity to answer the research questions.

For this research study, my participants consisted of 10 full-time, first-generation undergraduate Black men with a cumulative 2.5 GPA who were involved with at least one campus organization. Research indicates that retention and college success is passively influenced by out-of-class experiences as well as course-based learning (Beregn-Cico, 2013). I selected participants who were experiencing a positive campus integration and had a sense of belonging to their academic and social environment. The reason for that was to learn about the lived experiences of FGBM from an antideficit perspective by focusing on their positive experiences on a college campus. This allowed

me as a researcher to look for new nuances that can be applied to FGBM experiences who are having a difficult time finding their fit at their institution, which impacts their overall academic and social integration into campus. The number of sample size in qualitative research varies depending on the method that is being used. Once the researcher believes that participants are not bringing any new information to the study or the data is being replicated and redundant, then the researcher has reached the *data saturation* stage (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Therefore, estimating adequate sample size is directly related to the notion of saturation (Marshall et al., 2013). Additionally, participants were either in their second, third, or fourth year and between the ages of 18 and 23 at SJU. Students who were classified as juniors and seniors were included in the sampling frame to capitalize on their length of experience at the institution and within their major departments.

The participants of this study included individuals from various academic disciplines. I identified my participants from a total population of first-generation Black men (297) through a self-reported survey administered by the institution to all students when they applied to the university. Upon identifying them, I emailed the qualified students to invite them to participate in the study. Once I received a confirmation email from students, I contacted each student directly by email to explain the study, its purpose, and the safeguards to protect the participants in greater detail. Furthermore, I informed all students that their participation in the study was voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any point during the research. I also provided each student with a consent form that talked about the purpose of the study, details of the agreement to participate, and the confidentiality of their identity.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews. IPA research analyzes in detail the way in which participants perceive and make sense of set of events they experience (Smith & Osborn, 2009). In order to collect data for IPA research, the data collection instrument must be flexible (Smith & Osborn, 2009). Three types of data collection tools that are suitable for IPA research are personal accounts, diaries, and semi-structured interviews (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2009). For my research study I conducted semi-structure interviews. Semi-structured interviews created an opportunity for both the researcher and participants to engage in a meaningful and rich dialogue whereby the original set of questions were modified based on the way in which participants responded to the interview questions (Smith & Osborn, 2009). Furthermore, the researcher is able to use probes to further investigate interesting and important areas that are being discussed during the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2009).

When conducting semi-structured interviews, there is an attempt to establish a rapport with participants, and the order of questions is less important (Smith & Osborn, 2009). Moreover, the interviewer has the autonomy to probe interesting areas that arise, and the interview can follow the respondent's interest or concerns (Smith & Osborn, 2009). As the interviewer poses questions to the respondent, "The respondent shares more closely in the direction the interview takes, and the respondent can introduce an issue the investigator had not thought of" (Smith & Osborn, 2009, p. 59). Because the respondent is seeing as an expert when discussing an issue, he should be granted the maximum amount of time to tell his own story (Smith & Osborn, 2009).

For the purpose of this study, I used a two-tiered interview process. In tier I, I scheduled an interview with each participant for about 45-60 minutes at a location that was comfortable for him. The location could either take place within participants' residence hall, student center, library, or even off campus. For this study, the location that all students selected was the library on campus. The participants were informed that they can either call, email, or text me if they had any questions regarding the study and/or their participation in the study. Several students did contact me to reschedule the interviews due to last minute changes to their daily schedule. During the tier I interview process, I asked each participant about their background and their academic and social experiences on campus. Prior to the second-tier interview, I informed each participant that I will be following up to gather more information. During tier II of the interview process, I followed up with my participants and asked them questions about the experiences that impacted their sense of belonging on campus. Having a two-tiered interview approach assisted me as the researcher to be fully engaged with my participants about their overall lived experiences in addition to having them fully immersed in the interview procedure. I used the interview guide approach because it helped me to better understand the views of my participants and the way in which they shared their college journey with me (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Interview guide approach ensured that the same general information was collected from each participant in a study (Moustakas, 1994). This approach helped the researcher with having the degree of freedom and the adaptability in obtaining the information that was needed from all interviewee (Moustakas, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

I conducted semi-structured interviews, which permitted me to develop a number of in-depth interview questions about my topic and asked follow-up questions during or after the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed for additional topics to emerge from the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This technique helped me to continue and guide the conversation in various directions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This type of technique was connected to phenomenology research design because it permitted the participants to rely on their memories and reflections to revisit their previous lived experiences (Lauterbach, 2018).

Prior to the interview, I provided my participants with a consent form to sign. This form indicated that they will be audio recorded during the interview session using a digital audio recording device. As the interview advanced, I engaged in responsive interviewing, which is a style of qualitative interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Responsive interviewing focuses on building a trusting relationship with participants while engaging in a friendly conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This style of interviewing allowed participants to speak about their experiences and to share some important information that they would not share with others in a formal or informal setting (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Document collection. In addition to semi-structured interviews, I used a document collection strategy as a way to compare and contrast the context between my data and documents and to identify similarities and differences between them (Altheide, 2011; Hodder, 2013). Upon concluding the interviews, I requested of each participant to submit different documents that would be helpful to answering my research questions. These documents included resumes, student certificates/awards, graphic elicitation, email

correspondence, and/or social media posts. Resumes of students aided with identifying students' campus involvements with various academic and social clubs and organizations and their overall experiences in college. Student certificates/awards demonstrated some associations between students' feelings being validated, accomplished, and mattered and having sense of belonging to a community.

graphic elicitation is a document collection tool that is used to generate verbal conversation or discussion (Thomas, 2009). Graphic elicitation could yield results from participants that are difficult to obtain through interviews or verbal communication (Crilly, Blackwell, & Clarkson, 2006). Graphic elicitation connects photographs to research interviews to generate comments and evoke feelings, memories, and information (Crilly et al., 2006; Harper, 2002). The difference between conversational interviews and visual interviews is the way participants respond to the visual images that are presented to them (Glaw, Inder, Kable, & Hazelton, 2017). The areas of the brain that interpret visual information are older than the areas that hold verbal information; hence, the visual photos ignite deeper understanding and interpretation of human consciousness than verbal information (Glaw et al., 2017). To create a deeper meaning and understanding of the respondents' experiences, I asked each participant to submit photographs that spoke to their experiences at SJU. Moreover, I asked participants to share any correspondence they may have received from their faculty or staff that spoke to their academic performance or personal achievements. Finally, I requested participants to submit any social media posts related to their sense of connection or community and campus integration because they captured thoughts, feelings, and experiences that participants may not otherwise shared during the interview.

All the interviews and documents that were collected allowed me to triangulate all of my data and to see if the patterns or themes that emerged from my interviews were the same across all of my data. Data triangulation is a strategy that is used to ensure validity of data through cross verification from multiple sources of data (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Furthermore, triangulating data is a method that assesses the strengths and limitations of conclusions that were drawn from the data that was collected (Maxwell, 2013). Data triangulation aids with reducing risks and biases of a specific method and allows the researcher to have a better understanding of issues that are being investigated (Maxwell, 2013). To complete this analysis, I used the five stages of analyzing a document (Altheide, 2011). These stages involved identifying of an issue, developing a protocol, collecting and coding data and creating patterns and themes in an organized fashion, data analysis, and reporting the findings (Altheide, 2011).

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) introduced six different practical approaches to analyze phenomenological data. Creswell (2007) insisted that in order to conduct a phenomenological data analysis, researcher must:

- (a) describe personal experiences with the phenomenon under study;
- (b) develop a list of significant statements about how individuals are experiencing the topic;
- (c) develop significant statements about the topic and then group them into larger units of information;
- (d) write a description of what the participants in the study experience with the phenomenon using verbatim examples;
- (e) write a description of how the experience happened; and
- (f) write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions (p. 159).

Applying these approaches to my study resulted in affording rich and meaningful information for themes that emerged from the experiences of participants in which they discussed.

In order to better understand the lived experiences of FGBM at SJU, I administered a semi-structure interview (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018). After I conducted and transcribed my interviews, I started to code my transcripts. There are two different types of coding: process coding and pattern coding (Saldana, 2016). Process coding, which is also referred to as action coding provides meaning to various actions that are generated in data (Saldana, 2016). This method of coding uses gerunds “ing” word to describe an action or to suggest an action in the data that is captured by a usage of a word or phrase (Saldana, 2016). Process coding could be applied to activities that are observed such as attending events, being involved campus, forming a community and general action such looking, thinking, praising, and engaging (Saldana, 2016). The appropriateness of utilizing process coding is when a researcher is looking for specific set of routines and rituals of individuals (Saldana, 2016). Process coding was useful to my study because it guided me as the researcher to capture numerous actions that arose from my transcriptions and related them to my topic of research, which was the lived experiences of first-generation Black men at a predominantly White institution.

Then I used a second cycle of coding called pattern coding (Saldana, 2016). Pattern coding relates to grouping different sections of data into smaller categories, themes, patterns, or concepts that are emerging from the first cycle of coding (Saldana, 2016). Pattern coding was applicable to my research study because it enabled me to condense my process codes into small chunks of units and create themes (Saldana, 2016).

This method of coding guided me as the researcher to further analyze my process coding and identify themes that spoke to ways that my participants experienced sense of belonging on campus and how their campus integration was impacted by their sense of belonging. In qualitative research, the primary goal of coding is to break down the data and reorganize or rearrange them into various categories that compares different information in the same category and helps with development of theoretical concepts (Maxwell, 2013). Coding further provides credibility to the research that is being done and is useful for describing why the result of the study is based on themes and categories that emerged from data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As I completed my coding, I created a codebook for my data. The codebook contained different themes, definition of each theme, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and direct quotes of relevant themes. Upon completing the codebook, I continued to triangulate my data to see if different methods provided any strengths or limitations to my study, or if my methods supported a single conclusion (Maxwell, 2013). Data triangulation diminished any potential risk that I encountered during my conclusion segment of the study and it permitted me to obtain a more secure understanding of the problems that I addressed in my research (Maxwell, 2013).

Role of the Researcher and Worldview

My overall college experiences have allowed me to create various assumptions and beliefs about first-generation college students. Creswell and Creswell (2018) referred to this as the constructive worldview. This paradigm relates to those individuals who seek to better understand the world and make their own subjective meaning of it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Constructivism is about understanding and reconstructions of meaning

and content of competing constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). One of my assumptions about FGCSs is that not all first-generation students struggle in college and not all of them identify as low-income. Too often people think that just because a student identifies as first-generation, they come from low socio-economic background and with limited financial capital. However, that may not always be the case. Another assumption that I had about FGCSs is that they persist and graduate at a lower rate compared to their counterparts. This could be due to the lack of academic preparedness, not belonging to a specific community or a group, or lack of access to social capital among many other factors.

Other beliefs and assumptions that I possessed about FGCSs is that they leave college without a four-year degree due to the cost of higher education and not having financial stability. Having access to financial resources is a major determinant factor in persistence; however, for some FGCSs it may not be a major component of their college success. Lastly, it is often assumed that FGCS are not college-ready; therefore, they do not possess skills and a strong work ethic that is required of students to persist in college. However, having to work with many FGCSs and disadvantaged student populations, I believe that many FGCSs do possess a strong work ethic, display a high level of resiliency, and seek opportunities that would grant them the academic and social skills they desire to have to better navigate their college experiences.

Aside from my own lived experiences and worldview of FGCSs, I have worked with many different Black undergraduate male students as well. Having worked with Black men in higher education has helped me to better understand their own lived experiences and form my own assumptions about them. Some of the beliefs and

assumptions that I hold about Black men is that they are perceived as thugs and dangerous human beings and often find themselves in trouble with the law enforcement. Another assumption that I have about Black men is that they are aggressive, lack academic competency, too often are discriminated against, and they experience tremendous amount of racism. Finally, my beliefs of Black men who are enrolled in colleges and universities is that they serve as role models for other men of color on campus, especially at PWIs, hold leadership positions within various multicultural organizations, and rarely ever speak about their mental and emotional wellbeing.

Although I have constructed my own assumptions of Black men based on my interactions and research on them, I did not use my own assumptions as a guiding framework to explore the lived experiences of Black men. I used the bracketing strategy to address and my own assumptions and biases and brought greater trustworthiness to the research that was conducted on FGBM (Gearing, 2004). Bracketing is a strategy that scholars use in research to compartmentalize their biases and assumptions about a phenomenon they are researching (Gearing, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

All of my beliefs and assumptions lead me toward really discovering the experiences of FGBM, learning about factors that contribute to their success, designing small and large scale opportunities that would enable FGBM to have a sense of belonging on campus, and creating and being a part of inclusive and meaningful communities, while succeeding and graduating at a higher level. Furthermore, in order to expand my own understanding and knowledge on FGBM, I spoke to various professional faculty and staff about my topic, read articles and journals about critical issues around FGBM, and explored factors that gave voice to their overall college experiences.

One of the reasons why I developed a passion toward this topic is because I too, identify as a FGCS and I truly believe in the work that higher education institutions need to focus on in order to assist FGCSs and Black men with their college transition and navigating and adjustment. I immigrated to the United States 20 years ago to obtain a better education. While I was in college, I was able to find a way to integrate myself into the college environment and find my community and network within the institution. That feeling of mattering and integration motivated me to finish college. Aside from my personal experiences, my professional experiences have also contributed to my passion in working with FGCSs and Black men.

Throughout my graduate work and professional career, I have worked with many underrepresented students, FGCSs, and students of color. Being able to relate to my students has permitted me to connect to my students' personal and academic experiences. Therefore, I fully understand the pressures that FGCSs and men of color face in college and I have devoted my time in helping them navigating their college experiences. I have worked and continue to work with FGCSs and Black men inside and outside of the classroom in great length, and my understanding of their experiences will most certainly increase my knowledge and interpretation of their experiences and their personal stories.

Ethical Considerations

Protecting the participants and their identities was critical in the design of this study. I interviewed my participants face-to-face at SJU as the primary means to collect data. Federal government has been involved with research to create a balance between the need to produce knowledge and the obligation to protect individuals being studied (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Therefore, every university is

mandated to establish a Human Subject Committee or an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to review all proposals for research prior to any research being conducted at the research site (Krawthwohl & Smith, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The purpose of IRB is to ensure the safety of individuals and to make sure no one is put at any risk. In order to receive IRB approval, the study must meet the following criteria: risks are minimized, risk/benefit ratio is reasonable, subject selection is equitable, informed consent is obtained and documented, data are monitored and secured, and privacy and confidentiality are protected (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Prior to collecting my data, I obtained IRB approval from SJU.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) indicated that researchers ought to avoid the urge to infuse their own personal, moral, and political views during the interview process of the research. Although I am extremely passionate about working with first-generation students and Black men, I have learned that my own knowledge and personal and professional experiences cannot be used to complete my scholarly work. With reference to the participants, their identities were protected and not disclosed to anyone. This helped to ensure that no one experienced any potential backlash or harm. The main expectation and obligation of the researcher is to confirm that the safety of participants is not put in jeopardy because of their participation in the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Due to the fact that the participants helped me as the researcher to advance my study, I had great respect and consideration for their time and contributions to this scholarly work (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure this, I kept all documents confidential and the identities of each individual was not shared with any member other than the researcher. This means that all interviews were done at a location that was comfortable with the

interviewees, which in this case was the library on campus. I also withheld all documents and records in a safe space in my residential area.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Maxwell (2013) argued that “Validity is a property of inferences rather than methods and is never something that can be proved or taken for granted on the basis of the methods used” (p. 121). Additionally, validity threats are made by evidence in research, not the methods (Maxwell, 2013). Research indicated that validity threats are seen as alternative explanations or interpretations, and the way in which data is understood in a different way (Maxwell, 2013). Trustworthiness focuses on the credibility and generalizability of the finding of a study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). For a study to qualify as a systematic inquiry, the study must advance through a rigorous process of reasoning. This process must be completed in a meticulous, conscientious, careful, diligent, attentive, scrupulous, exact, precise, accurate, thorough, sensitive, and a particular way (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

To maintain the trustworthiness and integrity of this study, I used member checking and peer debriefing (McCoy, 2006). McCoy (2006) expressed that member checking is a terminology that is used in qualitative research that brings trustworthiness to data analysis. Furthermore, I used member checking as a method to ensure that the interview transcripts accurately and authentically reflected participants’ experiences and thoughts. To achieve this, I asked respondents to review the transcripts and to make sure the transcription reflected what they discussed during the interview. In a phenomenological research inquiry, the researcher relies on his or her participants to established relationships and develop a dialogue that validates the phenomena as

described (van Manen, 1990). Moreover, based on the respondent's experiences that are going to be captured during the interview, I used literature to provide additional context that supported the assertions made by respondents.

Establishing Credibility

In phenomenology research, credibility is established when participants validate the overall construction and interpretation of the researcher in relation to the phenomena (Toma, 2006). Credibility takes place when results of qualitative research are believable from the standpoint of the research participants to convincingly rule out alternative explanation (Tracy, 2010; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Miles and Hubermann (1994) indicated credibility is achieved when findings make sense to individuals who are studying or those who are reading the study. The determination of credibility is based on evaluating findings to the extent that they conform what is already known (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009). Researches ought to convince others that the findings of the study are applicable or transformable to another environment or group of populations. Credibility brings attention to interpretations and the correspondence between the researcher and respondent's depiction of their experiences (Curry et al., 2009).

Summary

Researchers have used many different methods of inquiry to investigate the experiences of first-generation and Black men in higher education. Some scholars have used quantitative, others have used qualitative, and few have used mixed methods research designs to research first-generation and Black men at predominantly White institutions (Brooms, 2017; Engle, 2007; Ishitani, 2006; Harper, 2007; Harper, 2012, Petty; 2014; Strayhorn, 2008b; Wood; 2014). Many researchers have studied the social

and academic integration of first-generation students at colleges, sense of belonging of FGCS and Black men at PWIs, degree attainment, retention and persistence, and overall lived experiences of both populations (Deli-Amen, 2011; Giuffrida, 2003; O’Keeffe, 2013; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood, Newman, & Harris III., 2015; & Woolsey & Shepler, 2012). Although experiences of first-generation and Black undergraduate male students have been studied extensively, very little research has been done on the intersectionality of both populations. Therefore, this study focused on the intersectionality of first-generation students and Black men and the influence of sense of belonging on their social and academic integration at SJU.

In this chapter, I discussed my intentionality in determining every aspects of my research design. I justified my decision behind selecting qualitative research as my method of inquiry and discussed my reasons behind utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis as my strategy of inquiry, which provided the researcher with the meaning of lived experiences of participants. My decision on different forms of data collection methods included individual interviews, collection of documents, and photos. I discussed these approaches as appropriate methods of data collection strategy along with important considerations to ensure trustworthiness and validity. A total of 10 first-generation Black men at SJU who were in their second, third, and fourth year were selected to partake in this research study. I justified my decision on participants, subjects, and the setting, which aligned with my professional and personal interest of this study. Lastly, I discussed my procedure in analyzing the data, and my role as a researcher. It was important for me as the researcher to bracket my own assumptions and biases related to first-generation college students and Black men so that they do not influence my interpretation of lived

experiences of my participants. In chapter four, I discussed the findings, themes, patterns, and results of data that was collected.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the impact of sense of belonging on social and academic integration of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a predominantly White institution (PWI). A phenomenological research design was used as an approach to investigate the lived experiences and stories of each participant in this study (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2015). This phenomenological study utilized an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a strategy to explore how each participant interpreted their own personal and social world in detail (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Smith & Osborn, 2009). Moreover, IPA grants an opportunity to underrepresented student populations to talk about their own lived experiences and make meanings of those experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2009). In this study, students discussed their personal narratives, which helped the researcher to further understand how each participant made meaning of his own personal, social, and academic lived experiences at South Jersey University (SJU).

Various researchers have studied the lived experiences of first-generation students and Black men at PWIs (Davis, 2010; Gofen, 2009; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Hall; 2017; Harper, 2006; Ishitani, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2018; Strayhorn, 2008a; William & Ferrari, 2015; Wood 2013). Particularly, researchers have studied factors that contributed to first-generation college students (FGCSs) experiences, transition, persistence, and graduation (Castello et al., 2018). This also include the college application process, lack of access to social capital, familial challenges, financial barriers, and lack of academic

preparedness (Castello et al., 2018; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Davis, 2010; Ishitani, 2003). Not only do these barriers apply to Black men, but Black men also experience other roadblocks that make their college experiences more troubling. It is reported that when Black male students attend PWIs, they experience prejudice, racism, alienation, discrimination, isolation, and racial microaggression (Broom & Davis, 2017; Cuyjey, 2006; Harper, 2009a). Some of the contributing factors to those experiences included lack of sense of community, institutional climate, poor faculty-student engagement, lack of campus involvement, and deficiency in mentorship (Ancis et al., 2000; Bush & Bush 2010; Cuyjey, 2006; Harper, 2013b; Hawkins & Larbee, 2009). Despite the extensive research on FGCSs and Black men exclusively, more research needed to be conducted on the intersectionality of these two populations.

This research study provided narrative on the lived experiences of FGCSs and Black men in tandem. There were 10 students who participated in this study. Each individual met the sampling criteria. This included being at least 18 years of age, being a full-time student, having at least a sophomore status, a minimum of 2.5 overall grade point average (GPA), identifying as a first-generation Black man, and being involved with at least one social/academic student club. All of this data is represented in Table 1. To ensure the privacy of all participants, each student was asked to choose a pseudonym. These 10 FGBM are identified as Malcom, Chris, Jason, Dennis, Joseph, Devon, John, Dwight, Antwon, and Jacob. In this chapter, I provided an overview of each participant's background followed by themes and subthemes that emerged from my two-tier interview process.

Table 1

Participants

Name	Identity	Age	Year	Major	GPA
Malcom	Black	22	Senior	Communication	3.2
Dennis	Black	21	Senior	Accounting	2.71
John	Black	22	Senior	Chemistry	3.55
Antwon	Black	22	Sophomore	Health Promotion	2.7
Chris	Black	22	Senior	Economic	3.3
Devon	Black	20	Junior	Social Justice	2.54
Jacob	Black	22	Senior	Accounting	2.8
Dwight	Black	21	Sophomore	Computer Science	3.0
Joseph	Black	20	Junior	Secondary Education	3.0
Jason	Black	20	Sophomore	Information System	3.0

Participants Background

Malcom. Malcom is a 22-year old senior and a first-generation Black man. He is from East Orange, New Jersey, majoring in Communication Studies and Human Resources with a concentration in Africana Studies with a 3.2 cumulative GPA. Malcom attended Bloomfield High School Tech in Bloomfield, New Jersey and currently works for the Center for Family Services. In high school, the majority of his peers identified as students of color, which made his high school experience more enjoyable because he was able to relate to many of his peers on a personal level. Despite having a close connection with his peers, he was among the minority in going to college and pursuing a higher

education degree. In fact, many of his peers either did not graduate from high school, many times had a low hourly wage job, or were incarcerated. Although, attending college was not a top priority for Malcom at first, his personal experiences with his peers and desiring to have a better future for himself served as a motivational tool for him to enroll to college.

Malcom is very passionate about sports. In fact, he was one of the star football players in his high school. As a result, he received a scholarship to play football at Temple University. Because of a major injury right before high school graduation, his scholarship was revoked. This caused him to look at other institutions. Because he had a good high school GPA and high SAT scores, Malcom was able to get accepted to the Select Program at South Jersey University (SJU). Through the Select Program, Malcom attended a six-week Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF), Pre-College Institute (PCI) program. Although, he had a positive PCI experience, after he began his journey in the fall semester, he realized that his PCI experiences were vastly different from his experiences in the fall semester.

Dennis. Dennis is a 21-year old senior and a first-generation Black man from Newark, New Jersey. He is majoring in Accounting and has a 2.71 cumulative GPA. Dennis attended North Star Academy College Preparatory High School in Newark, New Jersey. Dennis was one of the scholars in the Cooperman College Success (CCS) program, which is a scholarship program for Essex County high school students. As part of the CCS program, Dennis attended a three-week summer program at the end of his junior year in high school. There, he took two classes and lived on campus. Upon completing that program and graduating from high school, Dennis attended the six-week

EOF summer program as well. Because Dennis had a high GPA in high school, he was accepted to several different universities. The ultimate factors that played a role in his decision to attend SJU were campus diversity, the location, and scholarship package he received. Despite his initial feelings of excitement and high energy, Dennis experienced homesickness, culture shock, and loneliness. Aside from his educational journey, Dennis is a business-oriented student. He started his own clothing line while in college and used that opportunity as a platform to be more involved with entrepreneurship. In his spare time, he worked on various designs, collaborated with other entrepreneurs, and found different ways to promote his clothing line. Most recently, he found a new passion in photography and is looking to create a portfolio for himself.

John. John is a 22-year old senior and a first-generation Black man from Sicklerville, New Jersey. He is majoring in Chemistry and has a 3.55 cumulative GPA. John attended Winslow Township High School and currently works at SJU as a Research Assistant in the Chemistry Department. John always had a strong academic focus and an interest in medical field. While growing up, he had a family doctor who ignited his interest in the medicine; most recently, his father was diagnosed with brain cancer. Those experiences helped him to translate his interest into a passion. John's family is from Ghana and he has strong ties to his cultural background. Because of those strong cultural values, family has played a major role in his success in pursuing a higher education degree. Unlike other students in this study, John did not attend the EOF program. John lived on campus for the first two years of his collegiate journey; however, due to the cost of living on campus and additional financial burdens, he decided to transition out of living on campus to living at home with his parents. John is an opportunist and takes an

advantage of every opportunity that is presented to him. In high school, his friends described him as someone who followed rules and guidelines. Furthermore, he kept everyone in check, and was on top of his schoolwork. John's college experiences led him to be more relaxed and outgoing.

Antwon. Antwon is a 22-year old sophomore and a first-generation Black man from Bridgeton, New Jersey. He is majoring in Health Promotion and Wellness Management and has a 2.7 cumulative GPA. Antwon attended Bridgeton High School and currently works at Shoprite and Champs Sports. In high school, Antwon had good grades and graduated high school with a 3.7 GPA. His academic performance led to him being accepted to 13 different in-state institutions. After graduating high school, he started attending a four-year private institution in New Jersey through a summer bridge program called Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), which is very similar to the EOF program. Due to the cost of education at this private institution, Antwon decided to transfer to SJU through the EOF program. During that transition time, Antwon went through a tragic personal experience of losing his sister. Not only did he experience an emotional distress because of the tragedy, but he also was distressed about having to pay for his outstanding bill from his previous institution in addition to helping his family to pay for his sister's funeral. Considering all of that, Antwon still managed to overcome those trials and tribulations and succeed academically. In fact, at the end of the pre-college institute program, his peers voted him to be the recipient of the Torch of Knowledge award. That award permitted him to represent his PCI class in the fall semester. Antwon has several younger siblings who look up to him as a father figure and

a role model. His goal is to create better future for himself and pave the path toward success for his siblings and future generations.

Chris. Chris is a 22-year old senior and a first-generation Black man from Newark, New Jersey. He is majoring in Economics and Social Science and has a 3.3 cumulative GPA. Chris attended Paulo Freire High School and currently works as a personal trainer. Chris was accepted to the Cooperman College Scholar (CCS) program and attended the EOF summer program. In high school, Chris was a responsible student who received good grades and stayed on top of his academic. In addition to SJU, Chris also applied and got accepted to Rutgers University-Newark; however, due to the familiarity with Newark and being too close to home, he decided to attend SJU. Aside from his academic pursuit, Chris has a great interest in personal training and modeling. Additionally, through his personal networks, he has been able to put himself in a position to model for small agencies. Chris has an older sister who motivates him to attend college and perform at a high level. Many of his peers from Newark did not attend college, most of them worked a normal 9-5 job, and a few of them were in jail. Seeing his friends' lifestyles and experiences guided Chris to pursue a higher education degree because he wanted to create a better future for himself and his family.

Devon. Devon is a 20-year old junior and a first-generation Black man from Trenton, New Jersey. He is majoring in Social Justice and Leadership and has a 2.54 cumulative GPA. Devon attended Allentown High School and currently works at Nike. He is someone with a positive outlook on life. Growing up in Trenton, he attended a predominantly White high school, where he was one of few people who finished high school successfully and attended college. Many of his friends were associated with

troubled individuals, which led to them to being arrested or being incarcerated. During the early years of his high school experiences, Devon was not looking to go to college. It was not until late in his senior year where he began to really focus on researching colleges and universities. Out of the 10 universities he applied to, he got accepted to two schools: Georgian Court University (GCU) and SJU. GCU was mostly an all-girl school and did not offer Devon a competitive financial aid package. However, he got accepted into the Increasing Male Practitioners and Classroom Teachers (IMPACT) Scholarship Program at SJU. It was through the IMPACT Scholarship program where Devon was accepted to the EOF program, in which he attended the six-week summer program. Devon started living on campus during his freshmen and sophomore year. However, he decided to move off-campus with this friend before the beginning of his junior year. Devon describes himself as a very energetic individual who enjoys networking and learning about new cultures.

Jacob. Jacob is a 23-year old senior and a first-generation Black man from Lawnside, New Jersey. He is majoring in Accounting and has a 2.8 cumulative GPA. Jacob attended Haddon Heights High School, which is a predominantly a White high school, and currently works at TD Bank. As Jacob was approaching high school graduation, he applied to various universities including University of Michigan, University of Delaware, and SJU. However, upon being accepted to the EOF program at SJU and receiving the best financial aid package, Jacob decided to attend SJU. While in the EOF program during the summer, he spent six-weeks living on campus and took two summer classes. Jacob has two older sisters and one older brother. None of them went to college. Nevertheless, one of his sisters is a registered nurse and his brother works in H-

VAC. Jacob had some familiarity with applying to college because his mother works at SJU; however, she never graduated from a university. Therefore, he still did not have much access to social capital compared to many of his non-first-generation peers. In high school, Jacob had a great interest in computer science. Those interests carried over to college when he decided to major in computer science and get involved with gaming and programming. Due to his greater interest in working with numbers and learning about investment, he changed his major from computer science to accounting.

Dwight. Dwight is a 21-year old sophomore and a first-generation Black man from North Bergen, New Jersey. He is majoring in Computer Science, minoring in Law and Justice, and has a 3.0 cumulative GPA. Dwight attended North Bergen High School and currently works in the EOF Office at SJU. Dwight was born and raised in Kenya for 15 years before moving to the United States to have greater access to educational opportunity and a better life. Toward the end of high school, Dwight applied to 10 colleges and universities. He decided to attend SJU because he got accepted to the EOF program. Financially, this was a better choice for him and his family. While growing up in Kenya, Dwight experienced living in poverty and dealt with a lot of adversities. Those experiences led to him and his family to be immigrated to the United States with hopes of having a better life and going back to Kenya and assisting others who are in poverty. Dwight is a type of student who has strong ties to his cultural and familial values. The challenges he faced while growing up in Kenya made him humble and grateful for the small opportunities that were presented to him in the United States. Aside from academics, Dwight enjoys working out, playing basketball with his friends, and spending time with his family and friends from his home community.

Joseph. Joseph is a 20-year old junior and a first-generation Black man from Newark, New Jersey. He is majoring in Secondary Education, minoring in Africana Studies, and has a 3.0 cumulative GPA. Dwight attended Riverside High School and currently works at AmeriCorps and serves as a mentor for First Star Academy. Joseph has a great passion in education and working with youth. Because of his background and personal experiences, he committed himself to mentoring youth and making sure they are well informed about the importance of higher education. While in high school, Joseph was very involved with his community and completed many different service projects. Because of his academic performance and having a stellar resume, he received a scholarship through the IMPACT Program at SJU. Furthermore, Joseph was admitted to SJU through the EOF program where he attended and completed the six-week summer program. Joseph is a family-oriented student who has an older sister. He is a selfless person who puts other's needs before his own, but never loses sight of his own goals and aspirations in life. Outside of his academic journey, Joseph has a strong social network and always tries to represent his community in a positive way. He thrives from networking and meeting new people and putting himself in a position to become a well-rounded student leader on campus.

Jason. Jason is a 20-year old sophomore and a first-generation Black man from Newark, New Jersey. He is majoring in Information System and has a 3.0 cumulative GPA. Jason attended Paulo Freire Charter School, but later transferred to Rahway High School due to the Charter School closing. Previously, Jason worked at a private parking garage company at SJU, though, due to scheduling conflicts, he now works at Popeyes during school year. When he is off from school, Jason works for FedEx. Jason is part of

the College Cooperman Success program and enrolled at SJU by attending the six-week EOF summer program. Initially, Jason wanted to go to school in California; however, due to the cost of higher education and receiving the most financial aid package, he decided to attend SJU. Jason has a younger sister and his goal is to create a better path for her where she does not have to face as many challenges as he did. Many of his friends from back home did not attend college and ended up being involved with drugs, getting into troubled with law enforcement, or not being as productive with their time. Nonetheless, Jason always wanted the best for himself and his family. He is the type of individual who reflects on his personal and professional experiences so that he can better understand his purpose in life. Upon graduating from college, Jason aspires to work with computers and programming.

Presentation of Themes

As mentioned earlier, this study was conducted to learn about the lived experiences of FGBM at a PWI and the way in which their social and academic integration were impacted by their sense of belonging. In order to collect my data, I conducted a two-tiered interview process. There are five major themes that emerged from my interviews. They were motivation toward degree aspiration, negative racial encounters, supportive campus environment, supportive campus relationships, and creating a campus within a campus. Degree aspiration is defined as students discovering a reason to attend college to obtain a post-secondary education. Negative racial encounters are referred to as negative experiences that students encounter due to their racial status. Supportive campus environment provided insight on having a positive and a supportive campus climate. Supportive campus relationships are described as meaningful and

impactful relationships between students and faculty and staff. Finally, creating a campus within a campus is defined as belonging to a subcommunity of a larger campus community.

Each of those major themes had various subthemes as well. For motivation toward degree aspiration, the subthemes included upward mobility and having a better life and family support. For the negative racial encounters, the subthemes were racial microaggressions and culture shock: dealing with being the only one. In the supportive campus environment theme, the subthemes comprised of Educational Opportunity Fund program, being supported through college mentoring, involvement in social and academic student clubs, and utilizing academic support services. For the supportive campus relationships theme, the subthemes were faculty/staff-student engagement and peer to peer connection. Finally, in creating a campus within a campus theme, the subthemes included navigating two worlds: double consciousness and Black South Jersey University. The themes and subthemes are reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

Thematic Map

Main Themes	Subthemes
Motivation Toward Degree Aspiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upward mobility and having a better life • Family support
Negative Racial Encounters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racial microaggressions • Culture shock: Dealing with being the only one

Table 2 (Continued)

Main Themes	Subthemes
Supportive Campus Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Opportunity Fund • Being supported through college mentoring • Involvement in social and academic student clubs • Utilizing academic supportive services
Supportive Campus Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/staff-student engagement • Peer-to-peer connection
Creating a Campus Within a Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating two worlds: Double consciousness • Black South Jersey University

All students in this study shared their reasons for being motivated to pursue a post-secondary education and factors that contributed to those reasons. Therefore, the first theme that emerged from my interviews was motivation toward degree aspiration.

Theme 1: Motivation Toward Degree Aspiration

First-generation college students (FGCSs) have lower degree aspiration compared to their non-first-generation peers, and in many cases, they belong to a lower social class (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Peters, 2009). Researcher have discovered that Black male students have a lower degree aspiration and attainment rates compared to their Black women peers (Goings & Shi, 2020). However, there are factors that impact the motivation of first-generation and Black men toward degree aspiration. These factors include parental involvement, intrinsic motivation, higher expectations from professors, positive faculty-student connections, and peer influence (Goings & Shi, 2020; Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008). Degree aspiration refers to being inspired and/motivated by internal or external factors to obtain a post-secondary education. There

were several influences that contributed to first-generation Black men being inspired to obtain a post-secondary education. One of those factors included upward mobility and having a better life. First-generation and Black men fall under the category of individuals without a traditional academic family background (Goings & Shi, 2020). Coming from this nontraditional academic family background inspired the students in this study to obtain a degree and to enhance their economic mobility so that they can have a more desirable lifestyle.

Upward mobility and having a better life. Post-secondary education is viewed as one of the most prominent elements of reaching a higher social class in the United States (Haveman, 2006). Furthermore, higher education has helped to enhance the social mobility and the progression of life opportunities of marginalized and disadvantaged populations (Haveman, 2006). For the purpose of this study, upward mobility and having a better life is defined as the ability to rise in the economic system and to advance one's social economic status to have a better lifestyle. Dwight was one of the students who came to the United States from Kenya. What truly inspired Dwight to get a degree was the concept of paving the way for others through economic mobility and helping his community from his country to have a better life. In his interview, Dwight stated,

I came to the United States from a poor country. When we moved to the United States, you see all these opportunities that my country did not have, and most people take these opportunities for granted. I tell them you can come to this country and be someone here, and once you have a good life here, you can help people from back home. That is what I want to do. I want to become someone big here, and then I want to go back to my country and help those people too.

Securing a job was another determining factor for obtaining a degree. Jason noted:

I know that it is hard to get a good job without a college degree, but it's a bit harder for someone with just a high school diploma to get their foot in the door, to get a good salary, or a good starting point as opposed to someone with a college degree. So, I had the mindset that I wanted to come here and make something of myself, try to be a better person, and try to leave here with a degree and make \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year.

Additionally, John discussed the importance of having a desire to go to college to learn and to better himself as a person. He noted:

I came to college to better myself. I feel like if I don't go to college, it would be much harder to be successful in the future. I have a passion for learning now, especially, now that I am at South Jersey University because it has turned my interest in chemistry to a passion. I am pre-med and I want to be a doctor. I got interested in the medical field when I was young. I had a family doctor who sparked my interest in medicine, and about a year ago, my dad was diagnosed with brain cancer. So, seeing him go through all of that sparked my interest.

These narratives suggested that first-generation Black men have numerous reasons to be inspired to obtain a post-secondary degree. Despite facing adversities and challenges, students who participated in this study were encouraged and motivated to create a more meaningful life for themselves. Upward mobility and the desire to have a better life was at the heart of these first-generation Black male students' college journey. These students demonstrated that obtaining a post-secondary education aided them with pursuing and achieving the American dream, which is accomplished through hard work

and commitment to one's passion. Aside from upward mobility and having a better life, family support also inspired them to obtain a degree.

Family support. Family support is defined as receiving direct and/or indirect assistance from a family member toward college transition and persistence. Family is noted to have a great influence on college choice and academic persistence (Brooks, 2015). Researchers and associates have long investigated education and family relationships in the African American communities (Nichols, Kotchick, Barry, & Haskins, 2010; Pallock & Lamborn, 2006; Taylor, Hinton, & Wilson, 1995). Reports from many scholars indicated that parental involvement, support, and educational expectations are positively associated with educational aspirations, academic performance, and college adjustment (Nichols et al., 2010; Pallock & Lamborn, 2006; Taylor et al., 1995). Guiffrida (2005a) studied understanding the perceptions of African American families on academic achievement of Black students. The results of this study confirmed that family support has a positive influence on the academic performance of Black students (Brooks, 2015). Moreover, the types of family support students received in this study included academic support, emotional support, and financial guidance (Brooks, 2015).

Jason received a different type of familial support. He talked about the support he received from his mother and the lack of support he received from his father during his first year at SJU before receiving encouragement from him at the start of his second year:

My mom has been a pretty good support system telling me she stands behind me and that she is proud of what I am doing even though she never went to college. It is just good to know that my family does support what I am doing. During my

freshmen year, my dad didn't really understand why I was going to college and said college is a waste of time and money and you don't really need it. So, he wasn't really supportive last year. But after my freshmen year and this summer, we talked more, and we hashed out all the misconceptions of college and what the benefits are. Now he is a better support system by telling me that that he is proud of me, to keep doing what I am doing, and that it's going to pay off.

Likewise, family played a key role in Devon being motivated, especially, since he had many people who invested in his success while in college:

My mom always wanted one of my siblings to go to college. She never forced it upon us, but knowing that I was the youngest boy, everyone was invested in me. So, whenever I needed something, all of my brothers invested in me. I took it upon myself and told myself that I have to make it no matter what. That is why I cannot quit in anything that I do because I have people other than myself investing in me to be successful.

Dwight, who is from Kenya, received family support from his parents and grandparents who live in Kenya. Dwight discussed how receiving words of encouragement helped him to stay positive and committed to his education:

My grandparents are still in Kenya, and every once in a while, they call me and say, "Hey, my grandson is in college and he is going to be something." They look up to me and that puts a lot of pressure on me. Like if you fail, you fail the entire community and the people, and that is something I don't want to do because everyone knows each other. My parents, grandparents, and friends always tell me to give it all your best and don't listen to anything. You can be whatever you want

to be. Whatever you put your mind into, just go for it. They pray and they give me good vibes. The support they are giving me is something that is getting me through tough time at SJU.

For some students, family served as an inspiration to obtain a degree, while for others, family supported their students through meeting their personal and financial needs. This means some parents brought food for their students and paid for some of their expenses so they can focus on their academics rather than working multiple jobs to pay for their expenses. For instance, John shared:

My family helped me significantly. My sister helped me with paying some of my bills when my parents couldn't. They are very supportive, and they looked out for me. Whenever they are on campus, they bring me food and take my laundry. My mom would also bring home cooked meals.

John also discussed how receiving support from his family helped him with his mental and emotional well-being:

My sisters have helped me to clean my room, especially, when I am busy. That takes the stress off me. Now that I live at home, I have to drive, and my mom pays for my car insurance, my gas, and sometimes my oil change so I don't have to worry about how I get to campus, which for a commuter is the most difficult thing. Worrying about how you are going to get here every day. I didn't have the money to pay for my parking pass, but my sister completely paid for my parking pass. I think without them, there are a lot of issues that I may have faced that would have prevented me from graduating on time.

As some of the students have demonstrated, family had a positive influence on their degree aspiration and college experience. Although, families of these first-generation Black men did not experience college firsthand, they still found a way to support their students. This helped these men to focus on their goals and academic aspirations so they can have a more pleasant and a desirable life. For other students, family did not serve as a major support system in degree attainment, however, it was still something that they wish they had because it would have helped them to have a less stressful college transition.

Although the students in this study had different reasons for obtaining a degree, they still had to find a way to navigate through different racial stressors and encounters as a result of their racial identity. Not only did these men had negative racial encounters in class, but they also experienced it in their residence halls, social events, and throughout campus. This made these students to experience culture shock on campus, which impacted their sense of belonging on campus.

Theme 2: Negative Racial Encounters

Racial encounters are defined as negative interactions between Black students and their White peers and faculty/staff. These racial encounters impacted FGBM experiences negatively by the microaggressive behaviors they experienced from their peers and faculty/staff. Microaggressions can be covert or overt verbal, nonverbal, and environmental insults or slights that communicate derogatory, prejudice, or racism toward any racially and/or culturally marginalized group (Locke & Trolan, 2018). Microraggressive behaviors make students experience imposter syndrome, perform poorly academically, have a difficult time adjusting to their social environments, and experience

lack of sense of belonging and community (Locke & Trolan, 2018). There are different types of microaggressions. The students in this study only experienced racial microaggressions.

Racial microaggressions. Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solorzano (2009) defined racial microaggressions as unconscious forms of racism that too often are unnoticeable when compared with more overt acts of racism. Racial microaggressions can take place inside and outside of the classroom, in larger campus milieu, and in social settings (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Although, experiencing racial microaggression did not apply to all men in this study, some of the participants did experience racial microaggressions at SJU. This included making a subtle joke about slavery or talking about someone's hometown negatively. For instance, Joseph talked about experiencing racial microaggressions in one of his classes. He stated:

We were talking about slavery and watching a movie about slavery and then a classmate made a joke about a White man having a gun and a native American would be like oh no don't shoot me. Then everyone in the class laughed including the professor and I'm like that was not a funny joke. That was like a "haha" towards all the minorities and I felt disrespected and uncomfortable. And there have been other examples like that in the classroom where if we are talking about slavery and I am the only African American person in class, everyone in class would look at me or I feel like all eyes are on me. One time we were talking about Martin Luther King, and out of nowhere, I didn't even raise my hand, but the professor was like "What do you think about it?" And I'm like what do I think

about it? You are the one with a degree, I don't have a degree. You tell me about it.

Though some students experienced racial microaggressions in the classroom, others experienced it in non-academic environments. For instance, Dennis experienced racial microaggressions in the work setting, which made him feel uncomfortable. He shared:

My freshmen year, the person who hired me didn't know where I was from and was saying that people from Newark are terrible. They shoot each other, and I would never go to work there. And then he turned around and asked me where I am from. So, I said Newark and then the conversation slowed down. He said, oh Newark is cool. I go to Newark International Airport all the time. But he was bashing Newark before knowing where I was from.

Students also found these types of microaggressive behaviors at homecoming tailgate and other social settings, which made them feel less part of the larger campus community. Devon explained this experience by commenting:

At the tailgate, you can see all the Black people on one side and all of the White people on the other side. That is a big difference. So, you just want to hang out with people of your own color. This happened at the tailgate. Like we were supposed to get free food at a free event. My friend and I were lined up to get food and we picked up the plate and one of the people who may have been a supervisor said, "oh I'm sorry this is for workers only, the people who only work at the Recreation Center." And in my mind, I was like this is a free event and there is free food. So later, I saw people getting in the line and picking up plates

to get food and they didn't even work at the Recreation Center. So why are they getting food and you denied me and my friend?

Additionally, students experienced various assumptions of criminality based on their race as well. For instance, Chris talked about his encounter with local police at an off campus gathering during the first few days of the academic year. He shared:

During the first three days of school, I was confronted by cops four different times. I had a White girl come up to me and gave me beer bottle to hold so she can light her cigarette. Then, the cop stopped me, and she kept walking away.

Those troubles that I came across almost made me lose my scholarship.

Chris also experienced racial microaggressions during the presidential election in 2016. He talked about being fearful of appearing in public:

During my freshmen year when I was walking, some dude in the truck with a confederate flag drove by me, asked me if I was thirsty, and threw a water bottle at me. I couldn't have a response to it because he was driving. So, I just took the water bottle and kept on walking. Also, when Trump won, knowing that I was at a PWI, it made me feel nervous because I didn't know how everything was going to turn out, especially, considering our history. So, I had to be careful when I went out or how I talked to people about politics because I didn't know how people were going to react.

Experiencing racial microaggression is a major concern for students of color, especially, Black male students who attend PWIs. Several studies have supported the notion that experiencing racism, microaggression, stereotype, and discrimination are common among Black students and take place within the university environment

(Douglas, 1998; Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012; & Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010). Additionally, the Black men in this study experienced these behaviors as a result of being one of the few, and sometimes, the only Black student in the classroom. This created a culture shock for many first-generation and Black men who attended SJU.

Culture shock: Dealing with being the only one. Culture shock takes place when students feel disconnected from the norm or their environment due to their racial identities, characteristics, and/or academic backgrounds (Torres, 2009). Many Black students use this term to describe the strangeness and discomfort they feel when attending PWIs (Torres, 2009). The culture shock that the majority of Black students report has been as a result of their experiences and interactions with different race and social class, which in many cases are foreign to them (Torres 2009). When discussing their initial feelings about attending a PWI, many participants experienced culture shock due to being one of the few Black students in the classroom. Various students shared that often, they are either one of the few or the only Black student in class. This made it difficult for them to connect with other students who did not look like them. For instance, Devon shared:

Once I got to campus in the fall semester, it was an eye opener for me because I didn't see many people who looked like me in the classroom. I always thought college was a diverse place and it was going to be everyone from all over the world in a big community. But it wasn't. It was me and another African American minority there and we had to rely on each other for help because sometimes people are not as open to help out minorities as we are to each other.

Devon talked about his perception of college and how that perception did not meet the reality. He noted:

My perception of college came from what I heard in middle school. I'm from Trenton and I went to a predominantly White high school. They talked about their brothers and sisters, about college parties, and going to class. So, I started to form my own image of what college was like. It's what you see it in movies like *Stomp the Yard* and *Drumline*. I was like oh college is so diverse and fun at the same time. You get to learn about yourself and other people from different cultures. But once I got here, it was not like that at all. That perception was made up from movies, hearing people talk, and social media.

Malcom further discussed his experiences with lack of diversity in the classroom.

He asserted:

My experience socially and academically has been challenging for the first two years. It was a culture shock. Academically, I was challenged because coming from an urban area, I felt like I was underprepared and wasn't properly tooled to come to college and do certain assignments. It was a culture shock because being from a predominantly Black neighborhood and coming to a school that I never visited, not too many people looked like me. I have never been around so many White people, ever. I am from an area where everyone is Black, and everyone knows each other. When I came here, I saw mostly people who didn't look like me. Both of my roommates were White, my entire hallway was White, and maybe 10 other Black kids lived in that hallway. So, it was a culture shock in that sense.

Jason talked about how some of his academic challenges created a culture shock for him:

Last year, I didn't belong to campus because I was the only Black person in my class. Coming from Newark, my education was not on the same level as another student. People in class were raising their hands and answering questions. When the professor was calling on them, they knew what they were talking about. It was almost like a second nature to them. With me I was struggling to see what was going on because I never learned those things. So, for me sitting in class and being the only person of color and not knowing what is going on versus everyone else knowing what is going on kind of made me feel out of place. Yes, I am a different person, but I am not stupid. I just had a different type of schooling than they did, and we all have different experiences. To overcome that, I sat in the front, I raised my hand, and tried to be more diligent and cognizant of what's going on. I raised my hand and asked questions. I don't care if people thought I am stupid or whatever, but I pay for classes and so I am going to make my money worth. I didn't want to let my background define who I was and how people were going to view me as.

Overall, most participants suggested that not seeing more students of color or Black students in the classroom environment created a culture shock for them. Moreover, the unfamiliarity with higher education and being a student of color contributed to the level of disconnect between students' perception of higher education and the reality. This led to them to experience a culture shock on campus, which made some of the students feel isolated and not belonged to campus because of being outnumbered by their White peers in academic and social settings. When students do not find their fit within their social and academic environments, it is difficult for them to be engaged with the

professors and other peers; ultimately, their campus integration is negatively impacted (Brooks, 2015). To combat these barriers, students utilized various campus support services at SJU, which was the third major theme in this study.

Theme 3: Supportive Campus Environment

University environment plays a vital role in the way in which students are integrated into campus (Tinto, 1993). A healthy campus environment consists of reaching out and making contact with students by empowering them to succeed through establishing their social and cultural niche (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, establishing an effective educational environment and community requires commitment to the development of all students (Tinto, 1993). That is why it is essential to have a supportive campus environment. In this study, I have defined a supportive campus environment as having a university that is committed to assisting students with their academic and social needs. This includes their overall college transition and adjustment. One of the ways in which students in this research study experienced a supportive campus environment was through the summer program in Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF), which was one of the subthemes of a supportive campus environment theme.

Educational opportunity fund (EOF). EOF is a college success program that provides academic and financial support to underrepresented student populations. Through this program, students attended a six-week summer program where they lived on campus, took two college level courses, and learned various skills that helped with their college transition. For many first-generation and Black male students, it is difficult to navigate the college environment due to many reasons that have been discussed in length in this study. Assisting students with overcoming the complexity of navigating this

environment has been one of the top priorities for many higher education institutions (Bir & Myrick, 2015). Many universities have established various transitional programs as a mean to provide intervention to at-risk students. These transition programs include a summer bridge component that is designed to provide intensive academic and residential experiences that are designed to enhance and strengthen the academic foundation and experiences of at-risk students (Bir & Myrick, 2015). The students in this study described the level of support they received from the EOF program. Dennis shared how the EOF summer program helped him to be better prepared for his freshmen year and how the office was very supportive of his academic aspirations:

I went through the EOF summer program at SJU. The summer program really helped me to get ready for the semester. From meeting new people and students who looked like me to knowing that they were going through similar experiences as me, all of that made me feel like I can do this whole college thing. But, EOF really helped me to know what to expect and they provided me with a scholarship and academic support I needed in order to succeed.

Antwon shared how the EOF program provided him with a sense of support and care:

My support system is anything that has to do with the EOF office. I truly feel like people really care about me all the time because everyone in that office just wants to see me succeed. Again, they want to see you graduate and they will do everything in their power for you to graduate. They offer free summer classes. They also have different people that specialize in different things such as mental health and financial aid.

Furthermore, Antwon talked about how the book loan opportunity in the EOF office helped him with saving money on purchasing books:

The EOF office has helped me so much. Just the book loan program goes a long way. I have taken many classes so far, which means that I have had at least 30 books. Books are very expensive. Who has money to pay for that? Especially if you are a first-generation student. Do you know what my mom would tell me if I went home and said I need \$3,000 for books? She wouldn't understand it. So, the EOF office has been able to give me at least one book each semester and that is a huge help. That is helping me to save a lot of money. I am not asking my mom for help. I am paying for my books out of my own pocket.

For Joseph, the cost of higher education was a determining factor regarding which college he would attend. Due to the fact that EOF provided him with a scholarship and financial aid package, he believed he would be more supported if he attended the EOF program at SJU:

I heard about the EOF program through my sister. When she was applying to college, she got into the EOF program and they gave her money. But my high school advisor told me not to apply to the EOF program because it wouldn't do anything for me. She was telling me the EOF program was bad, but I knew the benefits that were going to come out of the EOF program, so I just applied to it. Plus, I needed money and EOF gave me money.

Generally, students who attended the EOF program expressed the impact that the program had on their college journey. The EOF program is designed to help at-risk students have access to resources that permit them to be successful while helping them to

navigate through the complexity of the institution. This program has not only provided guidance to the underserved student populations, but it also has aided students to develop various skills that can be applied to their academic, personal, and social lives while in college. Researchers have noted that underserved student populations need to have access to certain information and support when selecting and attending college (Wachen, Pretlow, & Dixon, 2018). Therefore, summer bridge programs are designed to help students with accessing information and providing the level of support they need to select and attend college (Bir & Myrick, 2015). In fact, scholars have shared that summer bridge programs play a key role in easing the high school to college transition for students by elevating academic and social readiness, and boosting student confidence (Wachen et al., 2018). Another support system that students utilized while in college was being engaged in college mentoring, which is the second subtheme to the supportive campus environment Theme.

Being supported through college mentoring. College mentoring is defined as any formal and or informal interaction between a person with less experience (mentee) and a more experienced person (mentor) through a designed program (Husband & Jacob, 2009). College mentoring has eased the high school to college transition for many underserved student populations, helped foster a sense of belonging, enhanced academic performance, and provided social, emotional, educational, and professional support to students (Husband & Jacob, 2009). Moreover, college mentoring has improved students' self-esteem, interpersonal skills, motivation, and networking opportunities (Husband & Jacob, 2009). Finally, mentoring has reportedly reduced attrition rates, stress, and anxiety and has also elevated retention and graduation rates (Husband & Jacob, 2009). Some

students discussed the importance of having a professional mentor and how it influenced their overall college experience.

South Jersey University offers various mentoring programs. The most notable one is the Dr. Harley E. Flack Student Mentoring program. This program aims to improve students' academic and professional success and increase the retention and graduation rates of active program participants. The program's focus is threefold: to enhance students' overall university experience; to support students in developing core academic, personal, professional, and social/cultural skills; and to foster core civic and leadership proficiencies that will serve students personally and professionally. The program offers three different components: high school mentoring, peer-to-peer mentoring, and professional-to-peer mentoring. The high school mentoring component works directly with two local high schools by providing mentorship to high school students. The peer-to-peer mentoring component focuses on providing mentorship to incoming and transfer students. Finally, the professional-to-peer mentoring tier permits faculty and staff to serve as mentors to students in the program.

Dwight served as a mentee in the program during his freshmen year and shared how he was able to find a role model that he could look up to in the program as well as the importance of having someone influential in his life:

I was part of the Dr. Harley E. Flack Student Mentoring program. Last year I was a mentee and this semester I am a mentor. I joined this program because I was a freshman and I did not know what I was doing, and at that time, and I didn't know my way around. So, I felt like I wanted someone to talk to, to look up to, and someone I could trust. So, when I heard about the Dr. Harley E. Flack Mentoring

program through the EOF program, I got involved and they helped me to get a mentor. My mentor helped me a lot. We studied together, we spent a lot of time together, and he showed me a lot. Doing that made me fall in love with the program and I wanted to return the favor and that is why I decided to become a mentor this semester.

For Jason, having a peer mentor who was experienced and knowledgeable in the do's and the don'ts of college helped him to make better decisions in college. For instance, he noted,

I was involved with Harley Flack last year. I had a mentor. It was good because he was like a big brother. He had been here and knew how to navigate the campus. He was able to pass tips to me, tell me what to do and what not to do; what teachers to take and what teachers not to take. We also grabbed lunch and went to the mall. I told him everything that I was going through and had him help me based on his experiences.

For many students in this study, aside from serving as a mentee and a peer mentor, they also became involved with the high school mentoring component of the program by becoming high school ambassadors. Jacob was one of the ambassadors of the program and he talked about his experiences with mentoring high school students:

When I was involved with Dr. Harley E. Flack, I worked with high school students. I saw myself in those kids and I wanted to really mentor them. In the high school mentoring program, you work with students and you get to see students who are asking the same questions that you once asked when you were in high school and then you answer the questions and give them insight. You get a

chance to learn from them too. You learn about different aspects of their lives, their family struggles, their upbringings, and after they see you in college and hear your stories, they become very passionate about wanting to go to college. That really helped me to stay connected with them.

In thinking of Black men enrolled at PWIs, it is vital for institutions to provide them with guidance in navigating a space where most people do not look like them or share similar experiences as them (Husband & Jacob, 2009). Mentorship is rooted in interpersonal relationships, which is essential to understand the skill of relationship building (Dubois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). It was evident to see the impact of mentorship on these students' college experiences. Through having a peer mentor, they were able to identify different coping skills that permitted them to understand and appreciate the hardships of college life, to stay resilient through those hardships, and reflect on their experiences positively. Mentorship has been a vital process to the growth, overall development, and college transition and success of Black men at PWIs (Dubois et al., 2011). Besides using college mentoring as a support system, students in this study felt supported by being involved and engaged in various social and academic student clubs as well.

Involvement in social and academic student clubs. All students in this study revealed their level of engagement in numerous social and academic student clubs on campus. Their engagement with these clubs helped them with being surrounded by a supportive campus milieu. Social and academic student clubs is defined as having a formal or informal membership in any social or academic networks at the institution. Scholars have linked Black students' involvement in campus clubs and organizations to

successful transition, retention, and social integration (Brown, 2006; Museus, 2008, Patton, 2010; Patton Flowers, & Bridges, 2011). Furthermore, Guiffrida's (2003) revealed that when students of color are involved with racial and cultural organizations, they are less likely to have difficulty integrating into their social environment compared to students of color who are not involved with cultural organizations. The participants in this study discussed their involvement on campus, particularly in ethnic and cultural student organizations and how that impacted their campus integration and sense of belonging. For instance: Dwight said:

The first student organization I joined at SJU was African Student Association. Next year I'll be on the e-board. I joined that club because I was an introvert and a shy person, and I wanted to come out of my shell. I wanted to become a better public speaker and to gain leadership skills and I felt like this organization was going to help me to accomplish that. It is also for the Black community, so I felt like I can fit right in.

Dennis discussed his reasons for joining a cultural student club, especially, one that allowed him to relate to students from the same cultural background. In his interview, he shared:

I'm involved with African Student Association and I have been involved with that club since my sophomore year. The reason for that was because my family is Nigerian. So, I was like why not meet other students who are from the same background as me.

For Joseph, it was important to have a good balance of being involved with social, cultural, and academic clubs and being supported by the members of those clubs. He asserted:

When I first got here, the safest clubs I joined were history and secondary education clubs and that was because of my major and that was something that I was mostly interested in. That is the first club I joined. Socially, I was a general body member of National Association for the Advancement of Color People (NAACP), Black Cultural League (BCL), and Student Organization for Caribbean Awareness (SOCA). I was in those clubs because those were Black clubs and I'm a pro-Black person and those were the ones that I wanted to be involved in.

Through my membership in those clubs, not only was I able to get the help I needed, but also to help others with their challenges or anything they needed help with.

In addition to being involved in academic, social, and cultural clubs, some students were involved in Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) as well. BGLOs was a nuance that also appeared in the relationship aspect of students' experience. However, under the supportive campus environment theme, BGLOs empowered students to be involved in something that had cultural relevancy to them; through that, students found their campus integration more transparent and less difficult. Historically, BGLOs were created to foster a sense of validation and cultural significance for African American students (Gillon, Beatty, & Salinas Jr., 2019). Having memberships in BGLOs helped some students in this study to feel accepted and validated by their fraternity and members within the fraternity. Being involved with Greek organizations also introduced

these men to social, cultural, academic, and professional opportunities. For instance, Antwon noted how his membership in his fraternity provided him with many opportunities to expand on his social network and getting connected with people in his field of study:

I joined Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and that opened a lot of social doors for me.

The amount of people you meet and know just off that is mind boggling. Again, it is just a different opportunity. Some of my brothers work in the field that I want to work in. They write me letters of recommendation and they get me connected. I also joined a sociology club because I am taking a sociology class that semester.

This section suggested that being involved with social and academic student clubs had a positive impact on participant's experiences and made them feel supported.

Moreover, through their involvement on campus, they had an easier social and academic integration into college. For students who were involved with BGLOs, it was evident to see how they benefited from having membership in their fraternity and how they received support from their involvement with their organizations. Harper and Harris (2006) emphasized that membership in BGLOs provided students with cross-cultural engagement, social support, stronger self-esteem, and racial identity. Students who were involved with social and academic student clubs experienced a strong sense of community to campus as well. This finding further validated Tinto's (1993) theory of integration as his theory suggested that students' retention rates are influenced by their overall campus integration. Additionally, Tinto's theory suggested that for students to be fully integrated into campus, there must be a balance between their social and academic engagement in college (Tinto, 1993). Essentially, the more students are engaged in extra-

curricular activities and their academic programs, the more likely they are to persist and graduate at a higher level. In addition to being involved on campus, students found different academic support services essential to their academic integration.

Utilizing academic support services (tutoring, writing lab, and office hours).

Higher education institutions are committed to fostering learning, personal development, and retention for college students through providing various academic support services. For students to find these services effective, their participation and engagement is encouraged (Satin, 1984). Academic support services are a multitude of instructional methods or resources that are available to help college students with content mastery and academic performance. Many first-generation college students (FGCSs) enter college without the necessary skills to succeed (Ishitani, 2006). Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) pointed out that FGCSs lack knowledge in content, basic skills (written and oral communication, critical thinking, and research), cognitive skills, and social capital. As a result, many students found themselves frustrated because they did not have access to resources that would have helped them to overcome academic barriers (Roderick et al., 2009). To address these issues, institutions have offered students support services such as academic advising, counseling, tutoring, writing lab, supplemental instructions, workshops on how to utilize professors' office hours, and many other services. Providing intervention to students is necessary because it helps them to navigate college and take an advantage of opportunities and services that promote learning and student development (Tinto, 2004).

The participants in this study discussed their experiences with different student support services and how those services had a positive impact on their academic

performance. Many of them took advantage of the tutoring services. For instance, Jason talked about how the tutoring services helped him to enhance his academic performance:

I used tutoring because it helped me to do better in class. I was going through a lot with some of my classes and some of the tutors really helped me with the information I was struggling to learn. That also helped me keep my scholarship because I had to maintain a certain GPA.

In addition to tutoring services, Chris talked about his challenges with his writing and how the writing lab assisted him to become a better writer. He shared:

At first, I only used the tutoring services and then I used the writing lab. They really helped me to be a better writer and learn how to organize my paper. They also helped me to articulate my thoughts in writing and how to cite my sources correctly.

Antwon also found the writing lab an important office that supported his academic needs. He insisted:

Students who are working in the writing lab are getting a degree in writing. So not only it is beneficial to them, but it is beneficial to me to learn how to write, have a better grammar, learn the APA format and how to cite, and how to construct a sentence. In high school, I didn't know what MLA was, how to make a title page, or how to use correct margins. My high school did not teach me those stuff.

Aside from utilizing these services, several students chatted about the importance of attending professor's office hours and the way in which it impacted their academic performance: for example, John stated:

In the beginning, I didn't think that I would find it useful to go to my professor's office hours, but when I started taking organic chemistry and really needed to bring my grades up, I was like mind as well go to the office hours and check my answers and do the practice problems. It was extremely helpful, and it is something that I every student should utilize.

In Dwight's experience, due to his high school's lack of academic rigor, he found himself not as knowledgeable compared to his peers. Therefore, to enhance his knowledge on course content, he met with his professors during their office hours to go over the lectures:

For academic challenges I went to my professors' office hours to better understand the lectures. I asked one of my professors to go over the information with me so I can understand the content. I also asked if it is possible to slow down while teaching because most of the time, they are teaching with the expectation that I should know certain information when in reality I don't know everything. I told them what you are showing on board could be old for somebody else, but it is new to me.

In summary, students found various academic support services very helpful to them. Although asking for help was not easy for many first-generation Black men in this study, seeking academic assistance from the institution and attending faculty office hours had a positive impact on their academic integration and performance. It further enabled them to feel connected to the course content, assisted them to foster meaningful relationships with the faculty, and increased their level of engagement in the classroom. In addition to having a supportive campus environment, students also benefited from

having meaningful and positive relationships with their peers and faculty/staff. This concept was introduced as supportive campus relationships, which was the fourth major theme in this study.

Theme 4: Supportive Campus Relationships

The desire for establishing strong social connections and relationships is something that many students look for in college. Bourdieu (1986) indicated that “The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term” (p. 249). Having access to social capital can potentially construct social benefits (Harper, 2008). In contrast, lack of social capital can exclude people from certain information and opportunities (Harper, 2008). Furthermore, the quality of social capital can determine the strength of the relationship between parties involved (Dika & Singh, 2002; Harper, 2008). For those students with greater access to capital, there is an added value to their membership and belonging to unfamiliar settings, especially, for Black men in PWIs (Harper, 2008). Through access to social capital, students in this study established supportive relationships with campus constituents as well as their peers. Supportive campus relationships are referred to as mutually beneficial faculty/staff-student and peer-to-peer connections regardless of societal power, status, and privilege. Having an effective faculty/staff-student relationship was a subtheme that emerged from this study because it enabled students to feel accepted and valued on an institutional level and to thrive in their academic interests.

Faculty/staff-student relationship. Building a strong rapport with faculty/staff and students is essential to students feeling supported on campus and their college

experience (Kuh 2002). Faculty/staff-student relationships are on-going interactions and connections that are mutually beneficial to both parties. Kuh (2002) shared that faculty and staff-student interaction is a salient indicator of college student engagement.

Additionally, faculty and staff-student interactions are related to overall student development, collegiate experience, and educational success (Kuh, 2002; Umbach, 2007).

Faculty and staff relationships and interactions with students both outside and inside of the classroom influenced FGBM's college experiences at SJU. In fact, some of the faculty/staff-student relationships translated into mentoring connections, which students in this study benefited greatly from that engagement. John talked about his relationship with his faculty and how that relationship enhanced his academic drive and motivation:

My professor really helped me to get on track academically, and I took his advice with me and applied it to all my other classes. Our relationship really helped me to increase my drive and to study harder. I had class with him three times a week and I went to his office hours. Even when I didn't have class with him, I spoke to him a few times a month to build a relationship that was effective. He was someone that could help me with conducting research post-graduation. So, the relationship is going to evolve.

Dennis took an accounting class with a professor who displayed a great level of care for her students and wanted to see them succeed. Through building a relationship with his professor, Dennis was able to meet with her before his major exam and to go over the content he did not understand. Dennis noted:

I took a class my sophomore year called Principles of Accounting II and I wasn't doing too well. The professor emailed me to see her after class and to talk to her

about how I can improve my grade. She basically took off an entire Saturday to meet and study with me. I was with her for about six hours and then ended up getting a 92 on the next exam. She really wanted me to do well. It didn't matter where I came from. It was very eye opening because I didn't think professors would do that because growing up, I heard that professors would just give the syllabus, then the exam, and that's it.

Another benefit of having a positive relationship with a professor is being introduced to research and internship opportunities, which is something that many FGBM did not experience until later on in college. John insisted:

Academically, I was close with a lot of my chemistry professors just by having them in class. If you don't go looking for opportunities, they don't come to find you. Most students go looking for ways to better their resumes. I have gotten close to a lot of my professors and they have presented me with many opportunities that I would not have known about. So, I found those relationships very important.

Fostering a relationship with the university staff and administration also played a vital role in students' non-academic needs. For some students, staff-student interactions fostered a mentoring relationship. During student orientation, Malcom talked about his conversation with the Dean of Students at SJU, who too, identified as a first-generation Black man. Malcom shared:

During student orientation, I was crutched down and the Dean of Students picked me out from the crowd and told me to sit up. Afterwards, he spoke with me and

said if I ever need anything to let him know. Still to this day, if I need anything, I'll go to his office and he will help me out. He was influential in me staying here.

Malcom shared parts of his conversation with the Dean of Students:

He told me I was probably one of five black kids here. He said don't make us look bad. And when he told me that, I thought to myself that I am probably acting a little ignorant. When you are uncomfortable in a space, you don't want to be seen in that space. You are just trying to go home. But the Dean of Students just broke it down for me and told me that I am here for a reason. He said I have some potentials; so why waste it and why also make my family's name look bad?

Dennis, who is a part of a different mentoring/scholarship program (Cooperman College Scholar) had a faculty mentor. Faculty mentors are instructed to have weekly cohort meetings with their students and bi-weekly meetings with individual students.

Dennis shared:

My support system mostly came from my scholarship program, EOF program, classmates, friends, and Dr. Harley E. Flack mentoring. We all came here for the same reasons. For example, my Cooperman mentor has been very understanding and supportive. Every time I met with her; she wanted to know what is going on. At first, I was very vague because I didn't know what she wanted. But once I stopped being vague, the conversation kind of translated to an actual performance in school. I told her what was working well and what was not working well, what I like and what I don't like, and she actually helped me to build a certain schedule and who I should talk to and build a relationship with.

Joseph is a student in the IMPACT Scholarship program, which is also another mentoring program at SJU. When he first enrolled at SJU, he was majoring in education and was assigned a mentor through the IMPACT program. However, after he changed his major, he still found himself being supported by program's staff due to the relationship that he built with them. Through that supportive mentoring relationship, he felt valued and welcomed:

It is many African American and people of color that are administrators, professors, and doctors that help you on this campus and make you feel like you are a part of something. So, I automatically feel a connection with those people and that makes me feel like I am a part of that community. For example, I stopped being in the IMPACT program because of the change in my major. So instead of the IMPACT program denying me or not communicating with me because I was no longer a part of the program, they continued to check up on me and ask me how I was doing. They made me feel welcomed. Even at the tailgate, when I saw some of them, they came up to me, talked to me, and asked me how I was doing. They offered me any help I needed and supported me even though I was no longer part of IMPACT program.

By having a strong staff-student relationship, staff were able to check-in with students on a regular basis and make sure they were on the right track. For example, Chris stated:

I would say Mr. Whiting had a positive impact on me because he made sure I was always on point. He would check in with me on a weekly basis. The Director of Cooperman College Success program also impacted me because she would make

me reflect on why I'm in college. Mr. Alavi also helped me because when I would come to Cooperman meetings by myself, he would shine light on things that I should be taking seriously while in college. I don't know where I would be if it wasn't for my relationship with those people.

For Jacob, fostering a personal relationship with his Black faculty helped him to have a better academic performance in the class. He asserted:

I had one Black professor last semester and we talked about fraternities on his campus versus the ones on our campus. He was my law professor. I started with a D, and as we got to know each other, he helped me to improve my grade. If I got something wrong on the test, he showed me how to correct it. We related to each other on different stuff as well. At first, I asked him for help on my first exam.

Then, as he was helping me, we started talking about sports and our backgrounds, which helped us to relate to one another.

For Dennis, he found motivation in receiving positive feedbacks from his professor. It encouraged him to stay determined and on track to graduate. She shared:

I feel supported and motivated by seeing compliments from professors. Once I got that, I'm like ok, I can finish this class with an A, or I can do well in this class.

Also, this motivated me a lot to keep going and to make sure I stayed on track.

You want to show people that you are doing well.

It is evident that having a strong faculty/staff-student relationship is crucial to the overall development, academic success, and retention of students in this study. Students were encouraged to not only stay enrolled in school, but also to have someone in their life who believed in them and their potentials. Because of the adversities that first-generation

and Black men have continued to face in higher education, it is important for university administrators and faculty to foster meaningful relationships with their students and help them with navigating their college experiences (William & Ferrari, 2015). Sometimes, relationships between faculty/staff and students can be in a form of mentoring, which allows students to have formal and informal relationships with university administrators (Husband & Jacobs 2009). Through formal and informal relationships with faculty and staff, students formed trusting and long-lasting relationships. As a result, they had access to social capital and were integrated to campus with more confidence. Having a higher level of social capital and fostering relationships between students and faculty and staff can help students with developing a stronger academic identity (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). The sense of connection between students and university administrators promotes a higher deeper level of campus integration and sense of belonging on campus for FGCSs and students of color (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). Another important factor that impacted FGBM college experiences and their sense of belonging was their connection with their peers.

Peer-to-peer relationship. Research confirms peer-to-peer interactions are positively associated with interpersonal skills, intellectual self-esteem, and higher level of emotional intelligence (Swenson Goguen, Hister, & Nordstrom, 2010). Additionally, having loyal peers who share common interests tend to diminish the feelings of isolation, alienation, and rejection (Swenson Goguen et al., 2010). Students in this study emphasized the importance of peer-to-peer relationship and its impact on their campus integration and sense of belonging. In this study, peer-to-peer relationships are described as mutual connections between two or more students with common interests, values, and

understandings. According to Kuh et al. (2008), “Peers are very influential to student learning and values development, [and] institutions must harness and shape this influence to the extent possible so it is educationally purposeful and helps to reinforce academic expectations” (p.557). Engstrom and Tinto (2008) further insisted that students feel a sense of connection and relationship with their peers when they are not alone and isolated; more supported; and having more confidence in the ability to perform successfully in college. This sense of connection and relatability was more salient among FGBM and their fellow peers who had similar backgrounds and experiences.

The participants in this study talked about how their experiences were influenced by their connections and relationships with other students who had similar experiences as them. For instance, Devon said:

My experience at SJU has been an eye opener and has helped me to mature. When I first came to SJU through the EOF program, there were a lot of people who looked like me and could relate to the same story as mine. We all came from low income families and we needed more assistance to get to college because it is expensive.

Malcom shared how the Student Government Association (SGA) President, who also identified as a FGBM helped him to get his talk show started. He explained:

The SGA president helped me to get my show on campus. I was just sharing my idea with him on what I wanted to do, and he had the people in place that can help me out. His impact was great because when you come to south jersey, everyone that goes to SJU is from the same area. But he is from Patterson and I’m from East Orange. That is 30 minutes away from each other. Being a north jersey kid,

he actually understood my circumstances and where I was coming from. He was more than willing to help me to succeed by starting my own show.

John talked about the influence of people with similar stories on his drive and motivation. He insisted:

Coming here, I have learned to appreciate having people that are going through the same thing as me. I think it is important to surround yourself with people who are studying the same thing as you or who have the same goals as you because when you are not feeling driven, there are other people who can drive you forward as well.

Jason was able to foster a strong social capital and connection with his peers through gaming and skateboarding with his White and Black peers:

I have been making new friends by being in the Student Center and talking to people. In the downstairs area, there are games. It is also set up like a diner or café style where you can go sit down with your friends, eat, and chill. I also play this game called Pokémon Go and I have met so many cool people who play that game on this campus. It was like a sense of community between us because we could meet up in certain places and play together. It is a very social thing to do. I didn't know there was a community at SJU who played that game. I have met a lot of people through this game who I didn't know before. That helped me to create this sense of belonging and it made me feel good.

John highlighted how he was exposed to a strong sense of support and community from other Ghanaian students during Ghana's Independence Day. He shared:

Last year on the day of Ghana's Independent Day, which is the country that my parents are from, there was a bunch of kids on campus who got a flag of Ghana and they were yelling "Happy Independence Day" for the country. That was pretty cool to me because Ghana is not a big country and there are not many students from Ghana here. I didn't know those students, but I went there and talked to them. So that was a moment that I felt like I belonged to campus.

As shared earlier, BGLOs was referenced from two different perspectives in this study: student involvement and student relationship. Students who talked about BGLOs from a relational point of view emphasized the brotherhood aspect of the fraternity due to being belonged to the culture of Greek life. For Joseph, not only did his fraternity brothers served as a support system to him, but through their fraternal bond and brotherhood, he was also presented with different professional networking opportunities:

My biggest drive and influence come from my fraternity. That has opened a lot of doors for me. Through my involvement with my fraternity, I got a chance to know student center representatives, managers, the Greek Life Office, the presidents of different fraternities and sororities, and different people I need to talk to. Also, the brothers on campus have helped me to develop as a person. They have supported me personally, academically, socially, and encouraged me to be the voice of the Black community. If I am feeling down and need help with anything, I know I can rely on them being there for me.

Antwon reflected on his experience with his fraternity and how he relied on the brotherhood to get the support he needed when faced with challenges. He stated:

My line brothers (LBs) have helped me a lot. Having someone there with you through your struggles definitely means a lot. So, my LB and I struggled together and that helped me to rely on him a lot. Sometimes I am ready to quit and give up, but when I talk to my brothers, they say I have come along too far to give up. I have to stay with it.

Devon shared how his fraternity assisted him with his overall development:

My sophomore year I joined my fraternity because I wanted to be a part of something way bigger than myself. I wanted to connect with like-minded people like myself, and to align my goals in life with the fraternity goals. My fraternity helped me to be a professional. It helped me become a better version of myself than I was already becoming. I learned how to connect with people.

Jacob talked about forming a strong sense of social capital through the multicultural retreat, which it is a retreat for men of color to promote leadership, personal, and professional growth. He stated:

They also have events like the men's multicultural retreat. I feel valued because when I went to this retreat, I got a lot out of it. I met many random men that I never met before. When we came out of the retreat, we had this sense of brotherhood. We still talk today, we chill, and talk about certain problems. It helps me to know that I am not alone in this journey and other people are going through stuff just like me.

Finally, John took it a step further by talking about being able to relate to similar peers and faculty and feeling accepted by both groups. He claimed:

I feel accepted because I have been here for a while and people know me inside and outside, academically. I feel that from both peers and faculty. You meet a lot of people when you are going through hard situations and you tend to relate to them and create this bond with someone else that you wouldn't be able to create with another person who has not gone through what you have gone through.

The participants in this study leveraged their relationships and networks to have greater access to social capital, information, and opportunities. For many of them who attended the EOF program, their peers and networks within the program served as a strong component to gain social capital. Others were able to establish capital through other means such as gaming and other social and cultural events. For some students, membership in Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) helped with fostering a strong brotherhood with their fraternity brothers. This sense of brotherhood helped these students establish a sense of security and validation and it strengthened their sense of belonging on campus. Lastly, those students who attended the multicultural retreat, were able to identify other men of color who shared similar experiences as them. This led to fostering a relationship that was meaningful and brotherly. That sense of association enhanced these particular students' campus integration and college experience. Despite the peer-to-peer relationships, many students still felt isolated from the larger campus community. This resulted in them creating a campus within a campus, which was the last theme that emerged from this study.

Theme 5: Creating a Campus within a Campus

Campus integration takes place when students are fully engaged on campus (Tinto, 1993). Once they are integrated, they have an easier college transition (Tinto,

1993). For some of the students in this study, being integrated to SJU was not an easy task to accomplish because of a lack of cohesive and inclusive campus culture. This led to students finding themselves belonging to a campus within a campus encompassed of many Black students. Creating a campus within a campus is a term that was used a result of first-generation Black men having to mask their identities and lived experiences. This is just so that they can discover their fit in an environment that looked different from what they were accustomed to being. Discovering their belonging within the larger campus community forced these students to navigate two different worlds: The White world and the Black world. This nuance is known as double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903), which is one of the subthemes of creating a campus within a campus theme.

Navigating two worlds: Double consciousness. Many first-generation college students and Black men enrolled at PWIs find it difficult to navigate the campus because of their racial and their socioeconomic status. FGCSs often work multiple jobs to help their families with financial needs and still have to attend to their academic needs (Collins, 2010). For Black students, they find themselves navigating through an environment that serves predominantly White students (Kish, 2003). Unfortunately, neither of these student populations are accepted in any of two worlds (Collins, 2010). Navigating two worlds is defined as FGBM who find themselves navigating two different environments: one that is made for predominantly White students and one that FGBM created for themselves in order to belong to their own community. This concept is known as double consciousness. Double consciousness is a terminology that is used in higher education as a result of campus community that mirrors its outside local community (Wright, 2018). In the book *Souls of Black Folks*, Du Bois (1903) created the term double

consciousness to explain how Blacks were forced to navigate both their African and American identities and the psychological implications of going through this navigation (Goings, Alexander, Davis, & Walters, 2018). Double consciousness is apparent in different campuses and racial communities. It exists in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and not just between White and Black students (Wright, 2018). Du Bois (1903) stated that double consciousness is about looking at one's self through another person's eyes and striving to reorganize one's thoughts and feelings to be accepted by the majority. Almost half of the students in this study revealed that at some point during their college journey, they had to stop being themselves and behave in a manner in which it was acceptable by their White peers and faculty. Malcom talked about the stereotypes that are associated with the Black community and how those stereotypes forced him to present himself in a different manner:

When you are a Black person on this campus, there is a level of expectancy. They expect you to probably have drugs, or you are in college because you play sports, or you are just a student that is commuting, and getting involved with law enforcement. Especially being so close to Camden or places like that, they are probably thinking like you are from one of those areas. And if your car is tinted or if you play loud music... it is like White people play loud music and they are in these big trucks playing loud music. But, being an African American male, there is always a threat to us. Even at our programs, there is no reason to have 10-15 police officers at a cookout, but when they have Holly Bash, there would be only four of them. This is a college campus not a jail. Because of these experiences, I

have to always watch what I say, how I act, who I hang out with, and how to interact with people because I don't want people to have a negative perception of who I am.

Dennis talked about being stereotyped by his White peers because of the way Black students dressed:

Socially, you can notice a discrepancy when it comes to interacting with non-Black students. They sort of expect you to behave in a certain way. I always feel like I have to be at my best behavior. Like when it comes to dressing, often Black men wear du rags. And I feel like if I ever wore one and walked around campus, I would be judged for that because there is a stigma associated with that. They see that as if you are a certain type of person and not a good type of person.

Furthermore, the 2016 presidential election also impacted the way in which the Black men in this study behaved publicly. John noted:

That brings me to the example about students chanting inappropriate messages after Trump won the election. At the time, people had a perception of Trump and the fact that he had a racist agenda. So, when he won, the first thing that came to my mind was that oh they are probably looking at me different now because I am Black. Sometimes I felt like I couldn't even be myself in public around that time because I feared that a White student may say something to me that I wouldn't like. I didn't want to retaliate, but I also couldn't be myself.

Homecoming tailgate was another event where students experienced a sense of separation and stereotype by campus police, which made them feel as though they could not be themselves in public. Devon explained:

The football game is well over and then all the other clubs that are not minorities just pack up and go. So, at one point there are only minorities there with police officers. So, we may feel like we belong for the first three hours. However, once everyone leaves, there are only minorities there. Having the police there with just the minorities gives you this negative feeling because in the back of your head, you know you can't do anything because of the potential of getting into trouble for the smallest thing. So, there is a bigger chance of getting involved with the police than walking home. So, you know if the police are there, the event is going to get shut down or there is going to be a problem. So, you have to watch your back and make sure you don't do anything wrong, otherwise you will get arrested.

John talked about his experiences with White students' perception of Black students on campus, which was something that he experienced:

When I first moved in, just being at a PWI, during my freshmen year in my dorm, there was one other Black male and that was it. There was a weird sense of separate culture. It is almost like I can't bring any Black cultural things with me here because most students judge you and associate you with acting ghetto. It is almost like I had to observe how my White peers acted after they saw how Black people acted, before I could act on my own. Their observation impacted the way I behaved because you realize that there are certain ways that you cannot behave, and if you do act too recklessly, they blame it on your Blackness, as opposed to you being a college freshman.

Antwon discussed the difference between being able to relate to a peer of color versus a White student and feeling valued by people he can relate to on a personal level.

He explained:

It makes me feel valued because they are all people of color and I feel like they all understand where I am coming from and understand my point of view. Not just at SJU, but in the world in general. We already have that type of connection.

Sometimes when I talk to White people, I feel like they don't understand me and or my experiences. But when I talk to someone of color, I truly feel like they understand me and where I am coming from no matter how harsh my experiences may be.

Though not all the students experienced this, for those who did experience double consciousness, it created this lack of sense of belonging to the larger community as a result of constant code switching between being authentic and ungenune. As James and Lewis (2014) and Mutua (2006a) noted, Black men are stereotyped, policed, and profiled due to their race and Blackness. This has made navigating college more challenging for Black men who attend PWIs (Brooms and Davis, 2017, Harper, 2009b). To overcome these challenges, first-generation and Black students had to mask their identities and behave through the eyes of the White individuals with more privilege. This means FGBM were forced to successfully navigate the White environment while simultaneously belonging to the Black community, which makes them navigate through two complex worlds. To stop navigating both worlds and living in a double conscious life, African American students united and formed their own community within the larger SJU community. They referred to this subcommunity as "Black South Jersey University".

Belonging to Black South Jersey University. This term is defined as a subcommunity within the larger campus community that includes many African American students. Many of the participants in the study indicated that they did find their fit within the larger campus community at SJU. These feelings and emotions were as a result of the lack of support from the university and inclusive programming, negative experiences due to microaggressive behaviors, and lack of sense of belonging to the campus community. Research indicated that in addition to the academic domain, social adjustment considerably impacted students' overall college experiences (Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011). Moreover, students who encountered issues or challenges with their social adjustment reported to have more difficulty with succeeding at PWIs (Woldoff et al., 2011). These experiences created a sense of isolation for some Black students while encouraged others to foster a subcommunity that welcomed students of color at SJU. Other Black students at other institutions have formed their own subcommunities as well. For instance, at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the Black students created a community called Chocolate City at Massachusetts Institute of Technology to promote Black culture (Chocolate City, n.d.). Through this community, students promoted their ethnic identity, encouraged social and intellectual movement, and provided support to their peers (Chocolate City, n.d.). Through formation of Chocolate City, students were able to find their community and sense of belonging. For some of the students in this study, Black SJU helped them to find acceptance into a community that had relevancy to them. For example, Malcom specified:

The only community that I belonged to is Black SJU. Black SJU has its own name and I belong to that community for sure. It is a community that consists of Greek

Life and the African American clubs. But they actually make you feel included in everything.

For other students, there was a sense of segregation between the Black student population and the White student population. This resulted in Black students not being connected to the mainstream student groups. Joseph spoke about this experience:

I feel like even though I have a big connection on campus, I would never be a part of SJU as a whole. I feel like it is two different campuses. Black SJU will always have their events and they come together during homecoming tailgate, the Step Show, or Meet the Greeks. People always come together, and they are part of this big SJU family. But overall, I don't feel like I am part of the campus as a whole.

Many students believed that they belong to the larger community by default because they are enrolled at the university, even though their experiences did not support that sense of belonging. In fact, belonging to Black SJU was a matter of choice for students. Dennis shared:

I do belong to Black SJU because I am black, and we all do have certain goals that we want to accomplish. But it is segregated, and it shouldn't be that way. It would be better to have more focus on getting everyone connected to each other. I feel like I have to belong to the White SJU because that is the majority of student population. So, while I have made a choice to belong to the White community, I naturally belong to Black SJU because of my background.

Black SJU was heavily influenced and supported through Meet the Greeks. Meet the Greeks is a very popular event that brings together many students of color, many of whom identify as first-generation and Black. During this event, many different cultural

and Black fraternities and sororities gather to showcase their respective organizations and introduce students to Greek life. Due to the evolution of this event over the years, many students have viewed Meet the Greeks as a foundation of Black SJU. Joseph discussed how he was introduced to Black SJU through this event:

Once I started to immerse myself in the culture of the university, my friends started to introduce me to Black SJU through Meet the Greeks. At this event, you just see so many Black students and other students of color that make you feel like you are at a HBCU. Then, I started looking at different Black fraternities and decided to join Alpha Phi Alpha in fall 2018. I joined my fraternity for the sense of community and brotherhood aspects.

Overall, many students experienced various microaggressive behaviors and a division between the White community and the Black community. These experiences motivated students to form their own community within the larger community, which they referred to as Black SJU. Doing so, prevented them from masking themselves and encouraged them to behave in a manner that made them feel authentic and comfortable. Through fostering their own community, they established a sense of fit and belonging to campus.

Analysis of Findings

The purpose of the interpretative phenomenological analysis was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a PWI. To obtain my data, I conducted a two-tiered interview process where I met with each student participant at two different times. During tier-one interviews, I asked each participant questions pertaining to their overall college experiences and ways in which they were integrated to the

campus. Tier-two interviews allowed students to reflect on their experiences as Black men at a PWI and their sense of belonging on campus. In addition to the interview questions, I asked students to submit various documents and photos that spoke to their overall college experiences. This allowed me to triangulate the data and verify the same themes across all data.

Throughout the entire interview process, all students spoke to their experiences openly and authentically. To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of this study, I asked students to review the transcriptions and inform me of any misinformation or any information that was left out during the conversation. In some cases, I followed up with some of the students and inquired more information regarding their experiences, sense of belonging, and campus integration.

The interviews were conducted using two different conceptual frameworks: Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging and Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition. Strayhorn (2012) believed that students feel a sense of belonging to their community based on their basic needs, identities, academic and social experiences. Strayhorn (2018) further indicated that peer-to-peer relationships and interactions in the classroom or on campus were critical to the success of students. Lastly, sense of belonging took place when students had a sensation of connectedness, experienced mattering, or felt cared about, valued, accepted, and respected by various campus communities and constituents (Strayhorn, 2012). On the other hand, Tinto's (1993) model of attrition posited that students ought to undergo a set of changes if they are looking to be integrated into the college environment. He explained

once students become fully integrated into their social and academic environment, then they become successful members of their institution (Tinto, 1993).

Somewhat consistent with Tinto's (1993) model, researchers and associates have reported that a higher education degree provides people with upward mobility, economic progress, financial stability, and success (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). These reasons have also been utilized as an inspiration for students to attend college. Many of students in this study did not have the typical upbringing compared to their non-first generation and White peers while growing up. Therefore, they were exposed to many personal, familial, and financial barriers. First-generation Black men (FGBM) found motivation toward degree aspiration through upward mobility and family support. Students discussed how getting a degree would help them and their family to have a better life. Though none of the parents of these students had a college degree, many of them still found ways to support their children's academic pursuit and guided them toward graduation. This made students to feel supported and have an easier college transition. Because of their racial background, most students experienced racial barriers, which impacted their college experience.

Being a Black man at a PWI presented several challenges for Black male students. One of those challenges was experiencing microaggressive behaviors. Microaggressions are known as a form of innocuous and explicit discrimination that speaks to an individual's race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, belief, disability status, job title, and other identities (Chan & Latzman, 2015; Ellis, Powell, Demetriou, Huerta-Bapat, & Panter, 2018, Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015). Some of the men in the study spoke about experiencing microaggressions in the classroom while other

students experienced microaggressive behaviors outside of the academic arena. This made them to experience culture shock and to feel disconnected from their community.

In the current study, students experienced culture shock when they arrived to South Jersey University (SJU). None of the students in this study had firsthand knowledge of what it meant to be a college student. The majority of the students came from under-resourced high schools and low-income backgrounds. Where they come from, college was not a top priority for many high school students. Therefore, these students lacked knowledge on the college application process and financial aid opportunities that were available to them. Many of students also shared how they were the only Black student in class, which made it harder for them to establish a sense of connection with their classmates. This ultimately translated to them experiencing a major culture shock. For most students, experiencing culture shock led to isolation and separation from the environment due to the lack of diverse representation in the classroom. One of the ways in which the institution addressed negative racial encounters on campus was through developing a supportive campus environment.

One of those support systems included the Education Opportunity Fund (EOF) program. The vast majority of participants in this study attended the EOF program. The intent of the program was to help students academically and financially and provide them with a practical college experience prior to enrolling into college. The students in this study expressed how the EOF program aided them financially and helped them with fostering relationships with their fellow EOF peers. Furthermore, they asserted that the summer program prepared them for what they were going to experience in the fall semester and the way in which the program was going to support their academic goals. In

addition to the EOF program, being supported through college mentoring, being involved with student clubs, and utilizing various academic support services contributed to fostering a supportive campus environment.

Researchers have denoted that college mentoring programs have a positive effect on students' transition, retention, academic performance, social engagement, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendships (Cornelius, Wood, & Lai, 2016; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). All the students in this study were involved in Dr. Harley E. Flack Student Mentoring program and they all expressed how they reaped the benefits of being a mentee and a peer mentor in the program. Through the mentoring program, students had an easier college transition and relied on individuals who had gone through the introductory phases of college to gain useful tactics that helped them to have a more positive college experience.

Another avenue to help students to have a better college integration was campus involvement. Strayhorn (2018) shared that being involved with clubs and organizations has a positive impact on the way in which students learned, discovered their interest, were civically engaged, defined their values, enhanced critical thinking, built leadership skills, and multicultural competence. These determining elements allowed for students to have stronger connections with their peers and the campus community (Strayhorn, 2018). Finally, utilizing academic support services were viewed as another component of having a supportive campus environment. Researchers shared that using academic services such as tutoring have helped students to achieve higher passing grades, lower dropout rates, and greater academic satisfaction (Braine & Parnell, 2011; Crisp, & Cruz, 2009; Guerra-Martin, Lima-Serrano, & Lima-Rodriguez, 2017). Through utilizing these resources,

FGBM were able to have a more positive academic integration and experience at SJU. Fostering impactful relationships with faculty/staff and peers was another key theme that emerged from the data.

Having supportive campus relationship with faculty/staff and peers helped students to have sense of belonging on campus. Strayhorn and Saddler (2009) found that there is a positive correlation between faculty-student interactions and college satisfaction. Other researchers discovered that faculty-student interactions have positively impacted students' GPA (Cole, 2010), self-perception of academic ability, intellectual confidence (Cole, 2010; Komarraju et al., 2010), and persistence and attainment (Wood, 2014). For some students, faculty-student interactions have led to academic opportunities, while for others, it fostered a mentoring relationship. Additionally, for few students, faculty race or ethnicity did not play a major role in their interactions because faculty genuinely wanted to see their students succeed academically. However, other students noted that fostering relationships with diverse faculty and staff helped them to feel more comfortable with sharing their personal stories with them because faculty and staff were able to relate to their experiences. In addition to faculty/staff-student relationships, peer-to-peer relationships also had a major impact on their college experience. This presented students with access to social capital.

Based on research, having access to a strong social capital through intimate and close networks has enabled individuals to have access to information and emotional support (Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015). Research asserted that people's social capital is influenced by one's culture and economic status (Francique et al., 2015). Examples from this study described that although these FGBM did not have much of an access to

social capital prior to entering college, once they were enrolled, their social capital was enhanced dramatically because of the relationships with their peers. Moreover, when students were able to relate to their peers and share similar interests as them, they found a sense of community in an environment that seemed foreign to them. This aligned with Strayhorn's (2014) report in that creating an environment for Black students where they can form strong relationships with their peers is essential to their sense of belonging on campus. Despite the relationships that students nurtured with faculty/staff and their peers, they were still forced to create their own community within the larger campus community. This was as a result of having to behave outside of their norm in order to be accepted by their White faculty/staff and peers. This concept is known as double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903).

Double consciousness was introduced by Bhabha (1994) as two different worlds that Black people must navigate through in order to feel accepted by Black and White people. Additionally, the concept of double consciousness has been applied to higher education with a focus on how Black students ought to navigate the complexity of a PWI campus climate (Wright, 2018). The participants in this study discussed how in part they had to stop being their authentic to themselves and conform to what the norm was in order to avoid being discriminated against or stereotyped. This concept of double consciousness is also referred to as code switching, which is something that some of the students had to do constantly in order to find their belonging on campus. Glenn and Johnson (2012) introduced code switching as dissociation communication tactics that occurs when an individual interacts with a dominant culture or group. Through code switching behaviors, not only did students found a way to succeed in their academic

settings, but they had to hide their true identities to fit the PWI culture. To avoid having to manage two worlds that seemed to be very separated, students created a campus within a campus in which they described as Black South Jersey University (SJU).

According to many of students in this study, Black SJU encompassed Black student organizations, Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs), and students of color. Through Black SJU, students connected with other students who shared similar experiences as them, attended events that were geared toward the Black student population, and some even joined Black student clubs and BGLOs. This action helped them to feel valued, mattered, and belong to a specific community. Strayhorn (2018) suggests that “sense of belonging is important for Black male collegians, that they place significance on their ‘belonging experiences,’ that mattering facilitates their belonging different based on various identity factors, and sense of belonging promotes educational success” (p. 113). Through creating their own subcommunity, FGBM were able to feel valued and accepted by their peers, who too, belonged to the same community.

Summary

The focus of this study was to explore the lived experiences as first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a predominantly White institution (PWI). Upon data collection and analysis, five major themes and several subthemes emerged. All the participants in this research study were motivated toward degree aspiration because they wanted to have access to upward mobility and have a better lifestyle (Haveman, 2006). Although none of the parents of these students had a college degree, they were still supportive in their students’ desire to obtain a post-secondary education. Furthermore, most of the students in this study encountered negative racial experiences. One of those encounters included

experiencing racial microaggressions on campus. These experiences culturally shocked the students on campus because of being one of the few, and at times, the only Black student in class. These troubling experiences made it more difficult for FGBM to have an easier campus integration and a stronger sense of belonging on campus. Students overcame these experiences through receiving support from the EOF program, being involved in student clubs and college mentoring programs, and taking an advantage of academic support services. These opportunities fostered a supportive campus environment for these men and helped them to find a sense of belonging on campus. Through a supportive campus environment, students fostered impactful relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. In some cases, these Black men formed a mentoring and brotherly relationships with different faculty/staff and peers. Through these relationships, students increased their social capital and were able to experience a stronger connection to campus (Dika & Singh, 2002; Harper, 2008). Nevertheless, because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds, lack of acceptance by their White peers and faculty/staff, and being forced to live in two different worlds, students were encouraged to form their own campus within larger campus; they referred to this as Black South Jersey University (SJU). The culture of Black SJU included events/programs, BGLOs, and student clubs that catered to the needs of students of color. Due to the cultural connection between Black SJU and students, FGBM were more engaged with their peers, felt a stronger sense of connection to this smaller community; as a result, had a more positive and effective college transition and experience.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate and understand the lived experiences of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a predominantly White institution (PWI) and the impact of students' sense of belonging on their campus integration. In order to better understand the lived experiences of FGBM at a PWI, I interviewed 10 men who met the inclusion criteria, which was addressed in chapter three. Each man went through a two-tiered interview process in which they unpacked their experiences as a FGBM. In addition to the interviews, I collected and reviewed various documents that illustrated the experiences of these 10 men. Upon data collection and analysis, five major themes and various subthemes emerged; these themes were discussed in length in chapter four.

In this chapter, I discussed my findings, answered my research questions, and addressed implications for policy, leadership, and practice. Additionally, based on my findings, I provided recommendations that could benefit higher education institutions and their practices on supporting FGBM. Finally, I discussed the trustworthiness and limitations of this study followed by concluding remarks.

Discussion

Over the last decade, the number of minorities in the United States has increased (Fox et al., 2017). In fact, African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans are estimated to represent more than 50% of the total U.S. population by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2014; Fox et al., 2017). These growing populations have impacted the number of

first-generation college students (FGCSs) entering college, with 30% of incoming freshmen identifying as first-generation and 24% identifying as both first-generation and low-income students (Fox et al., 2017). Although post-secondary education is rich in diversity and rewards, navigating the system of higher education can be arduous, overwhelming, and challenging for FGCSs (Falcon, 2015). Researchers and associates have discussed reasons and factors that have contributed to the challenges of FGCSs including lack of college readiness, financial stability, familial support and involvement, self-esteem, poor faculty-student relationships, and lack of knowledge about higher education (Davis, 2010; Gofen, 2009; Ishitani, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Pratt et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2018; Stephens et al., 2014; Wang & Nuru 2017; Ward et al., 2012). These challenges and experiences have made college transition, adjustment, and campus integration more difficult for FGCSs (Fischer, 2007). When looking at the experiences of students of color, particularly, Black men, their college experiences, transition, adjustment, and campus integration are even more disturbing.

Although college enrollment for Black men has increased over the last two decades (25%-32%), their six-year graduation rate from public institutions is situated at 33%, which is the lowest of all races compared to 48% for all students (Harper, 2012). Moreover, two-third of Black men who attend 4-year public institutions tend to withdraw from the university, making their attrition rate the highest among all sexes and races (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). There are various elements that have contributed to the low retention and graduation rates and high attrition rate for Black men who attend PWIs.

Cuyjet (2006), Hall (2001), Jagers and Iverson (2012), and Kim and Hargrove (2013) shared that too often, Black men at PWIs experience behaviors of racism, isolation, microaggressions, alienation, and stereotypes. More reports indicated that Black men have not succeeded in fostering positive relationships with their faculty/staff, lacked campus engagement, or experienced different sociocultural stressors (Andriano, 2012; Bridges, 2011; Guiffrida, 2003; Tinto, 1993). These behaviors and encounters have created emotional and mental distress, anxiety, poor academic performance, and a lack of sense of belonging on campus for Black men at PWIs (Fleming, 1984; Flowers, 2006; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003). Despite accounting for patterns of experiences and challenges for FGCSs and Black men exclusively, this research further investigated their experiences in tandem. When marrying these two populations as one (first-generation Black men), navigating college is even more convoluted for this population.

Recall that the purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a predominantly White institution (PWI) and the way in which their sense of belonging was impacted by their campus integration. Through data collection and analysis, the following themes were identified: motivation toward degree aspiration, negative racial encounters, supportive campus environment, supportive campus relationships, and creating a campus within a campus. In addition to these themes, there were several sub-themes that were identified within each major theme.

The findings of this study suggested that all students were motivated and inspired to attend college to obtain degrees. Their motivation toward degree aspiration stemmed

from wanting to be successful, desiring to have upward mobility in society, and living a better life. Besides the fact that some of the students in this study were from different cities, they shared similar upbringings and experiences. While growing up, these students did not have the same access to educational opportunities when compared to their more affluent peers. For some of the students, graduating from high school seemed like a difficult task to accomplish because of their personal experiences. However, it was important for these students to find a way to break down barriers and detach themselves from stereotypes that were associated with first-generation and Black men. One of the ways in which students were able to steer through the stereotypes and attend college was through familial support.

Westbrook and Scott (2012) shared that family influence and support played a major role in college attendance and persistence. Others have insisted that student satisfaction in an educational environment requires a positive and a supportive family-student relationship (Mattanah, Brand, & Hancock, 2004). All students in this study expressed that they were inspired and supported to some extent by their family to attend college. Some students even mentioned despite not having any of their parents attend college, their parents still managed to find ways to support their children's personal and academic needs, which helped them with their college adjustment. Despite students' parental support, negative racial encounters made their college transition more difficult.

Some of the students had a difficult time navigating through various racial microaggressions they experienced inside and outside of the classroom. Hotchkins (2016) asserted that racial microaggressions can affect Black students' learning and community building (Hotchkins, 2016). These microaggressive behaviors are problematic, especially

since they are an indication of the racial campus climate, which is often suggestive of the way in which Black people have been treated by White individuals (Hotchkins, 2016). There are different types of microaggressions: microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations (Locke & Trolan, 2018). Microinsults refer to any unconscious verbal or nonverbal interactions, remarks, or environmental cues that convey rudeness, insensitivity, and insults that degrade a person's heritage, identity, or ability (Locke & Trolan, 2018). Microassaults are perpetrated behaviors that discriminate through obvious or hidden expressions (Locke & Trolan, 2018). Finally, microinvalidations are described as comments or behaviors that dismiss or nullify thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences of a person or groups (Locke & Trolan, 2018). Additionally, people tend to experience microaggressions as a result of their gender, racial ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class.

Students in this study who experienced racial microaggressions on campus found it more difficult building connections with peers outside of their race. This made them to feel isolated and separated from those individuals. For instance, one of the students discussed how he would only receive academic support from another African American classmate and not from any White students in class. This subtle behavior is a form of racial microaggression that most Black male students experience in the academia. This type of microaggression impacts students' campus adjustment, mental and emotional wellbeing, academic performance, sense of belonging, and campus integration (Locke & Trolan, 2018). Moreover, several students even experienced isolation outside and inside of the classroom settings, which made them experience culture shock on campus.

Many students experienced culture shock from being the only Black student in their classroom. Torres (2009) reported that students experience culture shock due to their experiences that are related to their racial status, which creates an unhealthy learning environment. It is not surprising for students to feel this sense of culture shock when they have been one of the very few first-generation and Black students in their classes. This experience made it difficult for them to build connections with their classmates, and at times, participate in class discussions due to the increase of self-doubt. Historically, the educational system has used a deficit-informed framework to describe first-generation and Black men in the United States, and portrayed them as incapable, affirmative action beneficiaries, unintelligent, disadvantaged, and at risk to fail at best (Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper, 2009a; Jenkins, 2006; Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Therefore, when they enroll at PWIs, they often feel out of place, undervalued, disrespected, or not accepted, which impacts their overall sense of belonging on campus.

As discussed earlier, all students indicated they experienced culture shock because they did not see many students who “looked” like them. It is essential to understand what that means and how it applies to students’ sense of belonging and campus integration. When students shared that they want to see more students who look like them in class or they come from a Black neighborhood where everyone knows each other, that means not only do they want to associate with students who can understand and relate to their experiences, but they also want students, faculty, and staff to care for them, know who they are, know their names, and value them as people that they are and not just as higher education consumers. This is something that all faculty and staff can rise to in order for students to feel less of a culture shock on campus. Knowing students

and learning their names have been associated with positive faculty-student relationships, indicator that a professor cares, and fosters a positive classroom atmosphere (Cooper, Haney, Krieg, & Brownell, 2017). This also supported Strayhorn's (2018) concept of sense of belonging as he believed that students experience sense of belonging on campus when they feel valued, accepted, mattered, and cared about by their peers and community constituents.

The findings further advanced this conversation by revealing that although FGBM in this study did experience culture shock on campus, they were able to overcome some of their barriers through a supportive campus environment. Some of the programs that contributed to the supportive campus environment included the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program, being supported through college mentoring, involvement in social and academic clubs, and utilizing academic support services.

According to students, the EOF program served as an essential platform in helping them with having a positive college experience and supporting them with their overall academic journey. Because the program focuses on the academic and social transition of underrepresented student populations, students received the academic and financial support they needed in order to have a more manageable college transition and adjustment. This finding supported the literature on the impact of bridge programs on students' academic performance, social integration, over all well-being, and developing a sense of belonging on campus (Strayhorn, Lo, Travers, & Tillman-Kelly, 2015). Bridge programs have proven to enhance students' academic skills, expand their knowledge on campus resources and services, enhance their cultural competency, and instill effective study skills and time management techniques (Walpole et al., 2008). Students in this

study further reported that through their campus involvement with various academic and social organizations, not only did they find their fit at the institution, but they also received personal guidance, moral support, and academic encouragement from the members of the organizations. Through their connection to student organizations, student mentoring program, and Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs), FGBM met and interacted with other students who shared similar personal stories as them; ultimately, formed a strong relationship with them.

In a study that was done by Kirk and Lewis (2015), it was found that social connection and academic adjustment to college were associated with college retention, and students' sense of belonging strongly impacted their overall college performance. In a different study, it was described that some of the social connections between students were related to group membership in fraternities, which was significant in having a rich collegiate experience (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). The results of this study supported Tinto's theory of campus integration. Tinto (1993) theorized that student campus integration is measured through a level of connection and involvement with the institution's existing academic and social structure. Therefore, not only did students benefited from being academically integrated, but they also benefited from being connected to their social milieu. When students are connected to their social and academic environments, they tend to form positive relationships with their peers and campus administrators (Tinto, 1993). Doing so leads to having a sense of belonging on campus. Researchers and associates shared that experiencing a sense of belonging can assist with overcoming various obstacles that first-generation students face while entering

college, especially, since most FGCSs receive less familial and social support (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2013; Meheta, Newbold, O'Rourke, 2011).

One of the other factors that contributed to FGBM having a positive college experience was their relationship with faculty/staff and their peers. Nurturing meaningful and supportive relationships with faculty/staff have been linked to college learning, academic integration, and a sense of belonging on campus (Demetriou, Meece, Eaker-Rich, & Powell, 2017; Falcon, 2015; Strayhorn et al., 2015). This study suggested that it is imperative for students to form positive relationships with their faculty/staff because it encouraged them to study harder, stay motivated, and be less worried about their college transition. Additionally, having positive faculty-student relationships helped students be informed of academic, research, and internship opportunities that were available to students. When marginalized and underrepresented student populations attend college, too often, they are not well informed about ways in which they can access and take advantage of available academic, research, and internship opportunities. This is even more prevalent for first-generation and Black men, which has negative implications for their social and academic integration (Dong, 2019; Strayhorn et al., 2015). Researchers and associates shared that when students experience social and academic success, they are more likely to have lower attrition and higher graduation rates (Dong, 2019; Swanbrow Becker, Schelbe, Romano, & Spinelli, 2017). Therefore, it is important for higher education institutions to find ways to inform underserved student populations about resources that are in place to help them with having a desirable college experience.

Another important aspect of faculty-student relationships is fostering trusting and mentoring relationships. Although, it may be troublesome for White faculties to build

trusting relationships with Black students, one way of establishing this type of relationship is by faculty being authentic and honest about their lived experiences and approach in connecting with students. For instance, in many cases, White faculty cannot deliberately relate to first-generation and Black students' personal experiences.

Therefore, it is essential for them to acknowledge that as their limitation and inform their students about the lack of that relatability. However, in order for White faculty to foster trusting relationships with students of color/marginalized student populations, they must take their approach a step further by getting students connected to individuals who can relate to their personal and social experiences so they can receive the help they need in order to be successful in college.

Despite having positive faculty/staff-student and peer-to-peer relationships, some students found themselves masking their identities due to perceptions that White students had of Black men. Some students shared that they could not behave or dress in a certain way out of fear of being negatively associated with thugs or criminals. This empowered them to find different ways to establish and to promote their own community through creating a campus within a campus, which they referred to as Black South Jersey University (SJU). By belonging to Black SJU, students built their social connections with other Black students, discovered their membership in BGLOs, and attended social events that were geared toward Black students. This sense of connection to a smaller community influenced their campus integration in a positive way.

This study explored the lived experiences of FGBM at a predominantly White institution. Furthermore, the impact of sense of belonging on students' campus integration was explored through Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) theory on College Students'

Sense of Belonging and Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition. There are many research studies on sense of belonging of first-generation college students as well as Black men who attend PWIs. Other research studies have focused on the campus integration of these two populations as well. This research study extended the conversation and research on first-generation college students and Black men in tandem and investigated the association between sense of belonging and social and academic integration. The essence of this study was the way in which each participant spoke authentically about their sense of belonging to their academic and social settings and how that sense of belonging to those environments guided them to have a less complicated campus integration. Due to having positive relationships with faculty and staff, FGBM experienced a deeper connection to the university and found themselves assimilating to the campus environment. These relationships were established through having traditional and mentoring faculty/staff-student relationships. This made students feel valued, accepted, validated, and belonged, which supported Strayhorn's (2018) concept of belonging.

This study underscored what has already been affirmed about the importance of strong and positive relationships between faculty/staff and students and the lived experiences of first-generation and Black male college students. However, this study begins to advance some of what we already know by talking about the nature of those relationships and the meanings of the connections that students make of faculty and staff investment (Strayhorn, 2018). Having positive faculty/staff-student relationships does not automatically equate to students having a sense of belonging on campus, nor does it translate into trusting and mutual beneficial interactions between students and faculty.

However, when faculty members display a level of authenticity with their approach and intent to learn about students' academic and personal journey in college, then students are able to form their own interpretation of faculty investment and commitment to their overall college experience and success (Strayhorn, 2018). This approach helped students to feel valued and mattered by the institution and accepted in environments such as PWIs. These feelings of acceptance and validation promote a stronger sense of community and belonging to the university and lessen the barriers that impact students' campus integration (Strayhorn, 2012, 2018; Tinto, 1993).

This study further extended the conversation from an organizational perspective. Every institution has its own culture and subculture. The concept of a culture is one that is defined by the university and its existing organizations (Heidrich & Chandler, 2015). Within the same institutional culture, there may be various subcultures that are formed by managers, discipline-based faculty groups, professional staff, social groups of faculty and students, peer groups, and location (Heidrich & Chandler, 2015). Although, not all factors of subculture are found in an institution, there are some that are emergent (Heidrich & Chandler, 2015). For instance, even though most first-generation Black men in this study did not belong to the overall institutional culture, their campus experiences to the subculture of the university helped them to feel a sense of connection to the subcommunity at SJU, which they referred to as Black SJU. This made the subculture of the institution very important to FGBM. Generally, when students of color enroll in college, they look for a sense of connection to an environment that is very foreign to them (Torres, 2009). Furthermore, students of color look for these connections through

previous experiences and relationships. Therefore, when they arrive to a college campus, they look to connect to those experiences.

Some of those experiences are in a form of traditions, which play a major role in creation of institutional culture and subculture (Heidrich & Chandler, 2015). SJU offers several different traditions for its minority students. They include, Mr. Black SJU, the Homecoming Step Show, Meet the Greeks, and Miss Black and Gold Pageant. These traditions have helped FGBM and other students of color to form a strong bond with each other and create new experiences that they can relate to and connect with so they can have a better college experience. Participating or attending these events helped FGBM in this study to establish a strong sense of belonging to the subculture of the university. Overall, the findings of this study helped to break new ground and better understand the concept of sense of belonging of FGBM at Black SJU. This means, FGBM being able to connect to the cultural experience and have an affiliation to the institution's subculture such as Black SJU or Chocolate City at Massachusetts Institute of Technology is a nuance that connects students to the large culture of the university. This creates a small concept of HBCU within the PWI environment.

Answers to Research Questions

This study aimed to look at the lived experiences of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a PWI. There were three research questions that guided this study. Answering these questions helped to improve the understanding of the way FGBM experienced sense of belonging on campus and its impact on their social and academic integration. Furthermore, the data collected in this study provided insights on students' college

transition and support systems that students perceived to be important to their sense of belonging and campus integration.

Research Questions

1. How do first-generation Black men describe their sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution?

Most FGBM in this study had similar lived experiences. Many of them came from comparable backgrounds and their personal and academic experiences mirrored each other. Almost all the students felt a sense of belonging on campus during the EOF summer program because they came into the program as a cohort and lived on campus for six weeks. During those six weeks, they took classes together and lived in the same residence hall, and through their personal interactions with their peers, they fostered strong sense of connections and relationships. In addition to those positive peer-to-peer interactions, they developed rich relationships with various faculty and staff, which made them feel more valued, mattered, and respected. These relationships were as a result of positive faculty/staff-student connections and the ability to relate to students' personal stories. Through these connections and shared experiences, faculty/staff were motivated to provide students with a great level of care and support. However, once students completed the program and started their academic journey in the fall semester, they realized their experiences were vastly different from their summer program. That affected their overall sense of belonging on campus once they began their academic journey.

All students discussed how they were always outnumbered by their White peers in all of their classes, which made them feel isolated and not represented. Furthermore, some students experienced racial microaggressions in the classroom, especially, when

they were asked to speak on issues that impacted the African American community. Those experiences put these Black men under more pressure because they were forced to serve as a spokesperson for all Black students. A few students did feel a sense of belonging in the classroom because they had professors who showed interest in their academic success and content mastery. Additionally, through their relationships with their faculty, some students secured internships, received more attention regarding their academic performance, and ultimately, did well in class. Those experiences made most students to feel a sense of belonging on campus. Even though sense of belonging to the academic setting varied for most students, almost all students had similar negative social experiences, which had an impact on their sense of belonging to the larger campus community.

Many students described their lack of sense of belonging to the larger community of South Jersey University (SJU). This was as a result of poor inclusive campus programming toward the Black community. Some students indicated that almost all the social programming on campus was intended toward the White community, which created a division between the two populations. Many students described how race played a factor in the way in which Black students were mistreated at various social events. These experiences made students feel less connected to the larger campus community. Because of the negative social experiences and various microaggressive behaviors that students experienced, they were empowered and interested in forming their own community within the larger campus community, which they referred to as Black SJU. Almost all students indicated that they experienced a strong sense of belonging to Black SJU because it consisted of many students of color and cultural organizations.

Through these social networks and their involvement in various cultural organizations, students received affirmation from their peers and faculty and staff of color, which made them feel that they belonged to Black SJU. Researchers have shared that belonging on campus is one of the determining factors of student retention, college transition, and overall mental health (Costello, Ballin, Diamond, & Gao, 2018; Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016). Students in this study confirmed that when they found their community on campus, they were more satisfied with their college experience and transition.

2. How does sense of belonging impact the academic and social integration of first-generation Black men at a predominantly White institution?

The findings in this study claimed that when FGBM experienced a sense of belonging on campus, they had an easier college transition. Furthermore, the feeling of sense of belonging had a positive impact on students' social and academic integration. This study demonstrated that when students were valued by their peers, faculty, and staff, they felt a strong sense of fit to their community. That feeling of connectedness ignited a sense of motivation in students to not only remain connected to their social environment, but also to devote more time to their academics. Strayhorn (2018) affirmed that sense of belonging serves as a vital goal or desire for Black men in college. Additionally, sense of belonging functions as a motive for academic and social opportunities for Black men (Strayhorn, 2018). When there is a desire for students to fit in specific communities or groups and stand out among their peers, they tend to commit more time to achieving their academic goals in hope for having a high level of engagement in the classroom (Strayhorn, 2018). This permitted students to gain more self-confidence regarding their sense of belonging in college and have less difficulty integrating to their campus

environment. Although, having a sense of belonging on campus helped FGBM in this study have a less troubled campus integration experience, for a few students, the lack of sense of belonging to the overall campus environment had a negative impact on their academic and social experiences.

Most students in this study did not feel a strong sense of belonging to the larger campus community due to a lack of inclusive social programming, microaggressions, and poor Black faculty and student representation in the academic setting. These behaviors and experiences made most Black men in this study feel isolated from the campus, which resulted in them not feeling that they were a part of a larger campus community. Gummadam et al. (2016) shared that “sense of belonging is more than specific relationship with individuals in the school; it assesses the broader sense of feeling connected to the larger school community” (p. 290). This lack of sense of belonging to the larger school community made it more challenging for these students to find their social networks within the overall campus setting. Research further specified that when students are socially and academically connected to their peers and the institution, they are retained at a higher level and have a greater academic performance (Kirk & Lewis, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative for PWIs to foster an inclusive campus climate that allows all students, regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds, to be more connected to the university’s culture.

3. What campus resources and support systems do first-generation Black men perceive to be important to their sense of belonging and social and academic integration into campus?

This research provided evidence that navigating college can be challenging for many students, especially for those students who identified as first-generation Black men (FGBM). As discussed previously, due to not being well informed on higher education and resources that are available to students, FGBM found it more difficult finding their community within an institution that is consisted of majority White students. Therefore, it is crucial for these students to be knowledgeable about campus resources and support systems that are available. The FGBM in this study demonstrated having a positive college experience in an environment where not many students looked like them or shared similar experiences as them through utilizing resources that were available to them. These positive experiences were contributed to the support in which they received from the EOF program, college mentoring, student clubs, and academic support services. Taking an advantage of different support systems allowed students to have access to social capital and use it as a gateway to gain information that helped them with their college adjustment and transition.

Harper (2008) insisted that social capital provides people with certain information and opportunities that they would not have access to otherwise. For those students with greater access to capital, there is an added value to their membership and belonging to unfamiliar settings, especially, for Black men who attend PWIs (Harper, 2008). Having access to social capital through various support systems helped FGBM in this study obtain information and opportunities that their non-first generation and White peers have had access to during their academic journey. Additionally, having access to social capital diminished potential challenges and barriers for these men, which permitted them to have a more positive college transition and campus adjustment.

Through various relationships with campus constituents and support groups, FGBM remained focused and determined and experienced a more positive campus integration. Additionally, they identified more effective paths to navigate a racially charged campus environment by getting involved with various student leadership programs and organizations (Harper, 2012). Moreover, through developing impactful relationships with peers, faculty, and staff whom also served as mentors and confidants to them, coupled with an abundant amount of familial support, students displayed a strong sense of resiliency to overcome social and academic barriers. Kim and Hargrove (2013) insisted that when Black students are involved with student clubs and have positive interactions with campus administrators who support their goals and aspirations, they are motivated to advance Black student concerns. Strayhorn (2008c, 2018) reinforced this by sharing that support from peers and faculty/staff is a key indicator for Black men's experiencing sense of belonging. Additionally, through membership in Black Greek letter organizations, receiving support from other Black men and peers with similar social identities, mentoring, and being involved with Black men initiatives, Black men are more connected to the campus and have a stronger sense of belonging to their communities (Strayhorn, 2010; Strayhorn et al., 2015).

Conceptual Frameworks: Reflection

This study explored the lived experiences of first-generation Black men at a PWI. In order to better understand the lived experiences of students in this study, I used Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) theory of College Students' Sense of Belonging and Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition. Strayhorn (2018) framed sense of belonging as a "basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior" (p.

158). He further shared when referring to sense of belonging on a college campus, it is about the way in which students perceive social support on campus, their feelings of connectedness, the experience of mattering or being cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community and other campus constituents (Strayhorn 2012, 2018).

Supplement to Strayhorn's sense of belonging theory, Tinto's (1993) model of attrition provided an explanation of elements that effect one's decision to leave college. Tinto (1993) posited that when students are connected to their social and academic environments, they are more devoted and motivated to persist at a high level toward degree attainment (McCubbin, 2003; Tinto, 1993). He further stated that if students are more engaged in their social milieu, then they experience a difficult time integrating to their academic environment (McCubbin, 2003). Conversely, if they commit too much to their academic communities, then they would have a more challenging time integrating to their social environment (McCubbin, 2003). Therefore, having a balance of both academic and social responsibilities and involvement promotes students to not only have a positive campus integration, but to also have a sense of belonging on campus (Tinto, 1993; Strayhorn, 2018).

In order to fully understand the lived experiences of FGBM in this study, it was critical to form my conceptual framework in a way that helped me understand students' level of connectedness to the campus community and the way in which their academic and social experiences played a role in their sensation of connectedness and belonging. Sense of belonging is not exclusive to other areas of student college experiences. Sense of belonging takes place as a result of actions and behaviors that are deemed to be

positive and motivational. It is a sense of need or desire that enables students to feel that they are a part of something greater. It is a feeling that one believes he/she matters to another person or a group; through having a “shared faith”, people’s needs, and desires are met through their commitment to one another (Strayhorn, 2018). This was important for students who identify as first-generation Black men because they entered college with more social, personal, cultural, and academic barriers compared to their non-first generation and White peers. These barriers made it more difficult for them to find group memberships and form communities that allowed them to have a positive campus experience.

Group membership and communities are formed as a result of being involved with academic and social communities. Academic communities are established through various reciprocal efforts such as positive faculty-student relationships, meaningful peer-to-peer relationships, being connected to academic enrichment programs, and academic support programs. When students are connected to these pockets of communities and have a strong relationship with faculty and administrators, they feel more encouraged and motivated to perform well and to persist at a high level (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Williams & Ferrari, 2015). When students persist and graduate at a high level, they experience a more positive academic integration and sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008b; Tinto, 1993). Aside from being involved academically, social communities were equally as vital to students’ campus experience, persistence, social integration, and sense of belonging.

Social integration takes place as a result of positive peer-to-peer interactions, campus engagement, group membership, and overall well-being (Robertson & Mason,

2018; Sinanan, 2016; Wang & Nauru, 2017). When students formed informal and formal relationships with peers who looked like them, shared similar experiences as them, and understood them, they fostered a deeper connection with those peers. This formation took place as a result of shared values, backgrounds, goals, mutual respect, and aspirations between students and the way in which those elements influenced their experiences. Therefore, when students were engaged in formal and informal social activities and extra-curricular activities, they felt a strong level connectedness to the university, which enabled them to have a positive sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008; Tinto, 1993). With all of that in mind, my study helped me further understand how sense of belonging interlinked with social and academic integration because one does not exist without the other.

Implications for Policy, Leadership, and Practice

Policy. The findings of this study had implications for policy, practice, and leadership. In terms of policy, my findings suggested that it is pivotal to continue to maintain and increase federal funding to support programs such as Educational Opportunity Fund. Such enrichment programs have served as gateways to many marginalized student populations including first-generation and Black men to enroll and graduate from college. Additionally, higher education leaders, deans, and key stakeholders may view the findings and consider revising current policies or establish new ones that can help students feel more welcomed and included on campus. For instance, institutional policy makers can review their social programming model and determine whether the programming model and activities are inclusive of all student

populations and not just the majority. This will help more first-generation Black men feel connected to their social environment.

In addition to the revising or creating new policies and guidelines, revisiting the academic policies and making the necessary changes is also vital to the academic experiences of students. Academic deans and department chairs should review the curricula and the way in which faculty is using inclusive pedagogy to enhance student learning. There is no one size-fits-all approach to teaching, especially when it comes to designing curriculum, instruction, and student assessment. Therefore, it is important for institutions to continue to improve policies that exclude underrepresented student populations from having access to all resources and create guidelines that will have a long-lasting impact on student learning and development.

Leadership. The findings of this study provided implications for leadership as well. Leadership is the ability to influence, persuade, and motivate others to achieve a common goal or to create a change (Northouse, 2012; Bass, 1990). Additionally, leadership takes place when there is a mutual and trusting relationship between the leader and its subordinates; without the trust of followers, the leader becomes unreliable and undependable (Northouse, 2012). Leaders of higher education ought to be aware of what effective leadership looks like and how it is practiced, especially, when it comes to addressing institutional and organizational issues. From a leadership perspective, the findings of this study have inspired me to follow my passion and continue to help first-generation and Black men have a positive college experience. As someone who also identifies as first-generation, I am obligated to stay true to my authentic self and use my own life story as a compass and a to lead others and to address the inequities in

educational policy and practice (George & Sims, 2007). George and Sims (2007) stated that authentic leaders frame their stories in a way that provide context for their lives, and through that context, they discover their passion and inspiration to impact their environment.

In addition to being authentic, my leadership style is practiced with intent to transform individuals. Transformational leadership is defined as a process in which leaders and followers help each other to advance to a high level of morale and motivation (Burns, 1978). This study helped me better understand myself as a leader and ways in which I can help my institution to identify and address social justice issues and inequities that impact lives of underrepresented student populations. Moreover, it is important to not only increase access to higher education for those who are less privileged, but also to transform lives so that students can enter the working world equipped with more knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed. With that in mind, transforming lives need to take place through the social justice lens. This concept is known as transformative leadership.

Shields (2011) asserted, “To be truly transformative, the processes of leadership must be linked to the ends of equity, inclusion, and social justice” (p. 5). Shields (2011) further insisted that transformative leadership is leveling the playing field and solving the inequities that students experience in their daily lives. It is about acknowledging power and privilege that one possesses, deconstructing social-cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity and reconstructing them, working towards transformation, liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, and excellence, and demonstrating moral courage and activism (Shields, 2011). Leaders within higher education must use their

skills and power as tools to address the inequities and social justice issues that impact students' daily lives and create a system that is more equitable and just for all students. They ought to understand how to serve as gate openers and enable resources and opportunities to be accessible and utilized by all community members and not serve as gatekeepers and prevent people from taking advantage of opportunities that are available to them. Lastly, as leaders, we must be brave and assertive in challenging the status quo because the status quo tends to prevent others from reaping the benefits of higher education.

Practice. Finally, the findings from this study had implications for practice as well. Through the lived experiences of FGBM in this study, it is imperative that higher education institutions move beyond first-generation student committees and task forces and establish a center or an office that supports first-generation college students directly. As discussed throughout this study, first-generation college students enter college with various needs and demands. Although there are programs and services in place to support this student population, there needs to be a more concentrated effort in place to enhance the overall academic and social experiences of this population. Moreover, there needs to be diverse representation of faculty and staff inside and outside of the classrooms so that students can see themselves in others and feel encouraged and empowered by the success of individuals in leadership positions who may have similar experiences as them.

This study suggested that many of FGBM had a hard time finding students, faculty, and staff who identified as Black. As a result, students were reluctant to seek assistance from health and wellness counselors who did not look like them. Some students further discussed how Black faculty served as role models and having that

mentoring relationship with them had a positive impact on their college experience and performance. Kim and Sax (2009) affirmed that quality and positive faculty-student interactions are associated with mastering the course content, cognitive skills, intellectual growth, attitudes and values, educational attainment, and career choice. Therefore, by hiring more diverse faculty and staff, Black men can have stronger connections to faculty of color and have a sense of belonging to their academic environment. Though hiring diverse faculty and staff is part of the formula, there should be a university wide on-going training for all faculty and staff as well.

Active and training on educating campus administrators and faculty on first-generation college students and Black men will not only raise awareness on understanding the lived experiences of these two populations, but it further promotes advocacy work within the institution. To those ends, training efforts could cultivate a first-generation support network for FGCSs from different disciplines and bridge the gap between first-generation and Black students and faculty and staff. As noted in the findings, some of the FGBM in this study experienced microaggressions and poor behaviors from their faculty in the classroom. Therefore, through intentional training, leaders of the institutions can educate the campus community on various types of microaggressive behaviors, the impact of those behaviors on students, and ways in which they can address microaggression within their classroom using microprogressive behaviors (Locke & Trolan 2018). Microprogressions refer to small and common acts or experiences that serve to challenge and eliminate biases, stereotypes, and discrimination through advocacy and support (Locke & Trolan, 2018).

Consideration for Future Research

The goal of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of first-generation Black men at a PWI and explore the impact of sense of belonging on their campus integration. Future research should replicate this study by comparing the lived experiences of other ethnic and marginalized student populations. Although the results of this study suggested that most FGBM belonged to a subcommunity of the university's larger community, future research should explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black women and see how their experiences may be different or similar to FGBM. The findings of this study also recommended that a few FGBM experienced some microaggressive behaviors inside and outside of the classroom, which made their campus integration more arduous. Future research should examine the impact of various types of microaggressions on the lived experiences FGBM and their mental health followed by internal and external factors that can diminish those threats.

Through data analysis, it was evident that FGBM found different types of motivation and inspiration to pursue a higher education degree. One of those motivational factors was their family. Future research should advance this study by focusing on the impact of family influence on their students selecting a major and their overall college experience. Identifying and selecting a major can be a stressful task for many first-generation Black men due to the lack of exposure to various career paths; oftentimes, students feel pressured by their family to pursue a specific educational degree. Therefore, it is important to investigate family influence on selecting a major and its impact on the way in which FGBM navigate this experience.

Recommendations to Consider

This study implied that first-generation Black men (FGBM) experienced sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution differently in that, many of them sensed a connection to the subcommunity of the university as opposed to the entire campus community. This subcommunity encompassed many students of color, specifically, Black students. Additionally, through various transitional programs, positive faculty/staff-student relationships, and access to various support systems, students had a more positive overall campus integration and less challenging college transition. With that in mind, higher education institutions can increase their efforts to help FGBM thrive on their campuses, have a stronger sense of belonging to the larger campus community and, ultimately graduate at a higher rate. To accomplish this, certain programs and initiatives should be taken into consideration.

Extended orientation program. As described in this study, one of the major challenges for first-generation college students (FGCSs) was lack of access to social capital and knowledge on available resources. Additionally, most FGCSs who identified as students of color often got lost in the shuffle of social and academic programs during new student orientation. Institutions have FGCSs attend new student orientation sessions with non-first-generation college students and expect them to keep up with the information presented to all students. This puts FGCSs under tremendous amounts of pressure, especially if attending new student orientation is their first time being exposed to a higher education institution. However, having a more concentrated or extended orientation program that focuses on FGCSs can help ensure that FGCSs and their parents receive all the necessary information they need in order to better understand the culture of

the university and resources that are specifically designed to further enhance their experiences. An extended orientation program can further permit the institution to provide direct support and attention to the needs and desires of FGCSs and advise them on specific academic related questions. Through this extended or concentrated orientation program, students can meet individually with their assigned advisor, meet some of their professors to foster relationships early on, network with other FGCSs and work toward building a community with them, and learn about the basis of campus life. The other recommendation for consideration is establishing specific centers that support first-generation and Black students.

Establishing Black cultural and first-generation student centers. Due to the intersectionality in identities that most FGCSs possess, it is vital for higher education institutions to identify designated centers that can meet the needs of FGCSs and Black students. Black students often feel marginalized or undervalued by their White peers while in college, and habitually, have a difficult time navigating the racial issues and the campus climate (Bourke, 2010; Glenn, 2010). These experiences have negative implications for Black students who also identify as first-generation college students and the way in which they feel supported and belonged on campus. Having a Black Cultural Center would allow for students to feel supported and connected to their cultural heritage. Black Cultural Centers offer cultural artifacts, community conversation, social and cultural events, a broad spectrum of programming that can meet the needs of Black students while educating the campus community on Black culture. Black Cultural Centers have been pivotal in empowering Black men in college to not only meet, but also to overcome institutional challenges, exceed expectations, and persist toward graduation

(Sanders, 2016; Weed, 2016). Moreover, Rullman and Harrington (2014) and Yakaboski and Perozzi (2014) shared that having cultural spaces specifically designed for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds communicate to students that many different cultural identities are acknowledged and welcomed at their institution. This would further help students feel belong to the larger campus community knowing that they have greater support from the university.

In addition to cultural centers, it is equally vital to have a specific designation for first-generation college students (FGCSs). As noted in this study, FGCSs have unique experiences and challenges when they enter college; often times, they have a tough time transitioning to their new environment. Despite having access to various campus resources, having a designated office that provides direct support to FGCSs is essential. Support services and access to those services can be decentralized and hard to navigate through for many of these students. Having a centralized location on campus provides FGCSs with a one stop shop location where they can discuss their issues with professional staff, allow them to triage their problems, and refer them to the right campus constituents for further support. However, in order for professional staff and other university administrators to be helpful to FGCSs and Black men, the university should provide them with diversity and inclusion training to increase their cultural capital.

Diversity and inclusion training. University administrators could be asked to participate in university wide diversity and inclusion training as part of their onboarding or ongoing professional development opportunity. Due to the level of experience and exposure to different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, social class, and other diversity traits, higher education institutions may wish to create and execute diversity and

cultural sensitivity training. By doing so, institutions could increase the cultural competency of leadership and all stakeholders as well as students on campus (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Moreover, diversity training and workshops could further enhance the behavior of faculty and staff and the ways in which they engage with first-generation and Black students inside and outside of the classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Moreover, ongoing diversity and inclusion training can further help the university educate faculty on inclusive pedagogy and ways in which they can create a more welcoming academic setting for all students by eliminating microaggressive behaviors. This helps marginalized student populations feel more confident in being engaged in class and more open to fostering a trusting and a positive relationship with campus administrators.

Fostering trusting and mentoring relationships with White faculty. For many Black students, it is challenging to build trusting and mentoring relationships with White faculty members at PWIs because of the lack of faculty's relatability to the lived experiences of Black students or their culture misunderstandings (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008). Nonetheless, one way that White faculty can foster trusting and mentoring relationships with minority students is by being authentic and honest with their poor knowledge on Black students' lived experiences and upbringings. When White faculty members pretend to understand or sympathize with personal life stories of students of color, then they become a "me too"er. A "me too"er is a person who thinks he or she understands someone else's storyline, however, in reality, he/she cannot relate to their experiences (Fleenor, 2016). Therefore, instead of having faculty to act as a "me too"er, they can acknowledge the fact that they cannot relate to

student's experiences and refer students to individuals who share similar storylines and those who serve as allies toward underrepresented student populations.

Another strategy that can assist White faculty and staff with building trusting and mentoring relationships with students of color is by taking a holistic approach in students' overall success. This means, aside from teaching and working with students inside of the classroom, White faculty should increase their efforts in learning about students on a personal-professional level and show interest in their academic and personal success. This tactic can be achieved through faculty making a personal commitment to be involved in their students' overall college experience and success, listening with intent to learn, and working with students to develop solutions toward their personal and academic barriers. This approach helps students to realize that faculty do care about them as people outside of the academic setting, which helps with having a sense of belonging on campus.

Another critical role that strong and positive faculty relationships play in students' way of learning about their sense of belonging and campus integration is by faculty showing a genuine interest in students' personal development and growth by attending their programs and events. Though it is not a mirror presence of faculty mentor at an event that automatically translates to students experiencing sense of belonging, it is the meaning that students make of faculty members' presence in those events and programs. When students experience presence and/or actions of a faculty member in that light, they interpret that behavior as something that proves to them that faculty do care about them. This type of behavior showcases a true level of authenticity to faculty's approach in learning about students, valuing them outside of the classroom environment, and serving as allies who are committed to minority students' success. Ultimately, this level of

support from White faculty translates to students of color having a strong sense of belonging on campus (Strayhorn, 2018).

Trustworthiness

When conducting qualitative research, it is salient to employ validity and quality assurance strategies. Arminio and Hultgren (2002) and Patton (2002) insisted that when conducting qualitative research, verifying methods is important to ensure data credibility and quality. Throughout my research and data analysis, I presented rich descriptions and results in an effort to better understand the lived experiences of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a predominantly White institution. Throughout my data collection and analysis process, I implemented strategies to further enhance trustworthiness and to increase the rigor of my research study. It was important for me to represent the lived experiences of my participants in a way that was authentic, accurate, and captivating. Therefore, the methods I described in chapter three were implemented and aligned with the standards of phenomenological research design.

During my semi-structured interviews, I used open ended questions and provided each participant with the autonomy to take control of the interview process. This permitted them to be reflective, speak freely about their overall college experiences, and take the discussion toward a direction that they consider to be important. Reflexivity helped me as the researcher to carefully and thoughtfully examine my students' interest, beliefs, and values and how they may have influenced my research study (Primeau, 2003). As students and I were engaged in discussions, I was reminded of some of my own lived experiences, which then translated into my own biases and preconceived notions. As I identified my own biases and presuppositions, I used the bracketing

mechanism as a tactic to acknowledge those assumptions and biases. Bracketing my own lived experiences and biases in research prevented me from influencing the findings of my study (Chan et al., 2013). Moreover, bracketing demonstrated validity of the data collection and analysis (Chan et al., 2013).

Aside from bracketing, I also utilized member checking as a tool to verify the information that was shared with me by each participant. Moreover, if I had any probing questions or needed more clarification on the narratives that were shared with me, I followed up with the participants. Member checking empowers the researcher and the participants to be engaged in a negotiation of meaning of a phenomenon that is being studied (Bradburry-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2010). As I conducted the interviews, I summarized what was discussed, and then proceeded to transcribe the data. Upon data transcription, I checked back with each student to ensure that the information that was presented to me aligned with their personal stories. This was a constant back and forth movement and interaction between the researcher and participants (Doyle, 2007).

In addition to conducting two-tiered interviews, I also collected various documents, photos, and materials from students. Upon receiving them, I coded them and identified themes and patterns that aligned with what they shared with me during the interviews. To ensure validity in my research and confirm the same patterns and themes across multiple sources of data, I proceeded to move forward with data triangulation (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Data triangulation enabled me to assess the strengths, limitations, and conclusions that were drawn from my data collection process (Maxwell, 2013). Upon completing data triangulation, it was evident that the patterns and themes

that emerged from my interviews supported the patterns and themes that were identified from the documents that were collected.

Limitations

Due to the nature of phenomenological qualitative research, the generalizability of the lived experiences of first-generation Black men was limited. One of the limitations of this study was that almost all the participants completed the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program. The EOF program is designed to help students with their academic transition from high school to college and assist with their persistence and graduation. Additionally, students who were enrolled in the summer program were informed about numerous academic and cultural resources that were available to them during the academic year. This study did not explore the lived experiences of those FGBM who did not attend the EOF program. Including FGBM who did not attend the EOF program in this study would have provided the researcher with more in-depth insight on how their lived experiences could be similar or different in comparison to those students who did attend the EOF program.

Another limitation of this study was that it was conducted at one institution. Therefore, the findings of this study are not generalizable to all FGBM at other institutions. To increase the generalizability, a new research study should be conducted at multiple institutions. The study can take place at public, private, historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Catholic, small, or large research institutions. Different institutions have different missions, visions, and values and offer many or fewer resources that could impact the lived experiences of FGBM. All

of that could have further implication on students' campus integration and sense of belonging.

As the researcher of this phenomenological qualitative study, I interviewed, transcribed, and coded the data that was collected. Moreover, due to my own identities, I have strong ties to my own personal lived experiences. During my interaction with each participant and the data analysis phase, it was critical that I monitored and acknowledged my own biases and assumptions through bracketing, which is something that I discussed in my chapter three. In addition to bracketing, I engaged in different conversations with my colleagues and peers to prevent my biases from influencing the process and the result of this study. Despite taking many precautionary steps to avoid employing my own assumptions and biases on the findings, I could have inadvertently influenced the results of this study.

Lastly, I collected and analyzed my data through two-tiered interview process and reviewed documents, photos, resumes, and email correspondence between students and faculty that spoke to the students' overall college experience. Though I collected rich data through my interviews, a few students failed to provide documents that I requested. For students who provided the requested documents, I was able to triangulate my data and identify emerging themes across all data that was collected. However, for those few students who did not provide the requested information, I was not able to triangulate the data effectively. Moreover, focus group interviews could have strengthened the results of this study; however, after my data analysis, I reached data saturation.

Conclusion

The focus of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a predominantly White institution (PWI). Specifically, this study explored FGBM's sense of belonging and its impact on their social and academic integration. As shared previously, the pathway to higher education is not the same for all students. There is a growing number of first-generation college students (FGCSs) in higher education with multiple identities, one of which includes being a Black man. When FGCSs enter college, they experience many different challenges and barriers that impact their overall college transition (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Pratt et al., 2017). Some of those roadblocks include lack of academic preparedness, financial barriers, family support, and lack of access to social capital (Martin et al., 2014; Pascarella et al., 2004; Schwartz et al., 2018). These challenges and barriers are even more troubling for Black men in higher education.

When looking at Black men's experiences in higher education, they experience alienation, discrimination, prejudice, microaggressions, and stereotypes (Brooms, 2018; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2009b). Moreover, Black men are perceived to be thugs or associated with criminal law agencies, suspects, and dangerous people (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). These experiences have made it more difficult for Black men to navigate college. When marrying FGCSs with Black men in higher education, it is evident to see the uphill battles they are faced with while in college. The adversities that FGBM are faced with have negatively impacted their overall sense of belonging on campus and the way in which they are integrated into the campus setting. The intent of my research study was to learn about the lived experiences of FGBM using Strayhorn's (2012, 2018)

College Students' Sense of Belonging and Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition theories.

Upon investigating the lived experiences of FGBM at South Jersey University (SJU), some students shared that their sense of belonging on campus was toward the Black community, in which they referred to as Black SJU and not the overall campus. This was as a result of lack of inclusive programming, microaggressive behaviors from White faculty and peers, and not being fully supported by the campus community. However, all students discussed the importance of having positive faculty/staff-student relationships and the impact that it had on their social and academic experiences at SJU. The positive interactions helped them feel valued, important, cared about, and respected, which are associated with experiencing a sense of belonging on campus (Strayhorn, 2012). Despite not having access to social capital, all students found support through the EOF program and its resources, college mentoring, student clubs and organizations, and various academic support services. Those support services had a positive impact on students' college experience, and it helped them feel more confident and motivated to continue their journey at SJU.

This study investigated the lived experiences of first-generation Black men (FGBM) at a predominantly White institution and further explored the impact of their sense of belonging on their campus integration. The conceptual frameworks that guided this study were Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) College Students' Sense of Belonging and Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition. This study extended the research on these first-generation college students and Black men to displaying the association between sense of belonging and campus integration. Throughout this study, these two

concepts were interlinked in reference to the lived experiences of FGBM, which indicated that there was a strong sense of association between sense of belonging and campus integration. Moreover, this study further emphasized the importance of advancing efforts and practices in hope for advocating for and supporting FGBM who attend PWIs. The results of this study suggested institutions ought to review, reassess, and modify current policies and practices that are in place that exclude FGBM from accessing opportunities that can be helpful to them. It is critical to change the narrative of first-generation and Black students in higher education. Too often, these two populations are viewed through the deficit framework, which does not highlight their strengths and positive attributes. Viewing these populations from an asset lens can empower and guide institutions to help students develop a growth/strength mindset. Having access to higher education is not a privilege, but more so a human and a legal right. Therefore, in order to help all students to flourish and grow, it is essential to learn about their lived experiences as human beings, challenge the status quo, and level the playing field. Doing so permits students to have a positive and effective college experience and reap the benefits of having a post-secondary education.

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Appendix A

Interview Consent Form

Please read and sign both copies of the consent form. You keep will a copy for your own personal records and I will keep a copy for my own personal records. Should have any questions regarding this study, you can contact me at (848) 469-0046 or you can email me at hatefalavi08@gmail.com.

I _____, give my full consent to participate in Hatef Alavi's research study on lived experiences of first-generation Black men at a predominantly White institution. I fully understand I will be answering questions regarding my own personal lived experiences at Rowan University. I also understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw myself from the study at any moment without penalty or retaliation. I also know that my information will be discarded upon the completion of the study.

To practiced confidentiality and protect my identity, Mr. Hatef Alavi will use a pseudonym and will secure my responses in an undisclosed location on his laptop. All record will be deleted upon the completion of study.

If I would like a copy of the finding of the study, I can email Mr. Hatef Alavi at hatefalavi08@gmail.com.

I understand that my participation in this research will require answering interview questions in two different sessions that will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I may refrain from answering any question at any time during the interview without facing any repercussion.

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix B

Audio Recording Consent Form

**ROWAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM**

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Mr. Hafez Alavi. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape the interview as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by research team. Specifically, as the principle investigator, I will be transcribing the audiotape and then look for emerging themes and patterns that comes out of the interview.

The recording(s) will include your name and the answers to the interview questions. However, your identity will not be used during the analysis of data.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file on my personal laptop that requires having a password to access information. The recording will be retained until the end of the study. Once the study is completed, I will be discarding the recordings.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Interview Protocol



Title of Project: The Lived Experiences of First-Generation Black Men at a Predominantly White Institution and the Impact of Sense of Belonging on Their Social and Academic Integration.

Principal Investigator: Dr. James Coaxum

Funding Source(s): Department Funded

1. Purpose/Specific Aims

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the impact of sense of belonging on social and academic integration of first-generation Black Men at a Predominantly White Institution. First-generation college students already come to college with numerous barriers and setbacks. On the other hand, Black men face challenges such as racial discrimination, reputation, financial need, academic skills, classroom involvement, and faculty engagement. When combining these two populations together, the university attendance and graduation rate for first-generation Black men are at its lowest over the last quarter of century. Investigating first-generation Black men's level of sense of belonging could help with enhancing their campus integration, retention, and persistent rate.

1.1 Objectives

The results of this study will benefit institutions and their practices on supporting first-generation Black men. Through the findings of this study, Rowan University is able

to assess their resources and support services that are offered for FGBM and find ways to strengthen or improve their services. Furthermore, it is important for colleges and universities to have preventive intervention strategies in place so that they can address particular problems that impact the sense of belonging and campus integration of first-generation Black men. Due to the fact that more first-generation college students and students of color are enrolling in 4-year institutions, colleges and universities could find a way to create an office or department that focuses on FGCSs. The findings of this research would provide these departments with rich data and information that is needed in order to create initiatives and practices that are suited toward the need of first-generation and African American population. These programs could vary from black men initiatives to student mentoring programs, weekly forum discussions around supporting first-generation Black men, or having orientation sessions specifically for first-generation college students. Through these efforts, students can ease their way into college, learn about the resources that are available to them, and acquire tactics that can assist them with their social and academic integration into campus environment and having a positive sense of belonging.

The parents of first-generation college students lack knowledge in college going processes, rigorous curriculum, ways in which they could support their students, and lack familiarity with educational and institutional terminologies. On the other hand, first-generation Black men can learn about ways in which they can find their community at predominantly White institutions, how to foster student-faculty relationships, and ways in which they can cope with experiencing racial battle fatigue. Having a great level of understanding and knowledge on how to navigate those opportunities could not only help

institutions to provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment for their students, but it could also help first-generation Black men to have a higher persistence and retention rate at predominantly White institutions.

2. Background and Significance

Although there are great benefits associated with obtaining a postsecondary education such as having a better life and a sense of accomplishment, higher income, job security and stability, and higher level of psychological well-being and happiness, certain populations are less likely to attend and graduate from a higher education institution, making it difficult for them to reap those benefits (Ishitani, 2006, Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Horowitz, 2018; Tate, Caperton, Kaiser, Pruitt, White, & Hall, 2015). First-generation college students, most of whom come from low-income background and identify as students of color do not share a similar path to higher education compared to continuing-generation college students and their White counterparts (Engle, 2007; Coffman, 2011). Due to the hidden status of first-generation college students, they may not be recognized or acknowledged among other groups and their social, cultural, and academic needs are too often overlooked (Kish, 2003). When first-generation college students arrive to college on their own, they are naïve about the campus culture as well as the role of their family in their lives, and experience mixed feelings of hope, confidence, self-doubt, and motivation (Kish, 2003). In a study that was done by Collin's (2010) on the impact of family involvement on pursuing a higher education degree, it was reported that some of the first-generation college students spoke in favor of familial support while others experienced more familial pressure, and few felt the nonexistence of their family in their pursue of higher education. In addition to the family pressures, when first-

generation college students enroll in college, they are under a great deal of educational pressure, which makes navigating the two worlds very difficult.

From 2000-2016, the enrollment rate for Black students had increased by 5% (31%-36%), which was 2% higher than White enrollment rate (39%-41%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Additionally, the enrollment for young Black men increased from 25%-33% from 2000-2016 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Strayhorn (2017) indicated that undergraduate racial/ethnic minorities are increasingly representing a portion of undergraduate students that enroll in public universities. In fact, Black students make up 2 million of over 21 million full-time and part-time undergraduate students who attend more than 4,300 higher education institutions, majority of them being public institutions (Strayhorn, 2017). When comparing Black men to their White counterparts, Black men are underrepresented at many higher education institutions and they maintain low an academic achievement (Hall, 2017). For instance, Harper (2012) reported a six-year graduation rate for Black men who attend public colleges and universities situates at 33.3% compared to 48.1% for all students. In relations to postsecondary education, half of Black men who graduate from high school attend a 2-year community college and few of them attend a 4-year institution (Strayhorn, 2017). However, two-thirds of Black men who begin their journey at a 4-year institution drop out, making their attrition rate the highest among all sexes and races (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). Black men experiencing rejection or hostility from their White counterparts in their academic and social settings lead to disengagement from their predominantly White campus community (Brooms & Davis, 2017). In addition to that, there are various synonyms associated with Black men

in the Society. Black men are often associated with criminals and been labeled as “brutes”, “thugs”, “suspects”, or “persons of interest” by law enforcement agencies (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Moreover, other factors such as racial profiling, heavy involvement in the criminal justice system, mass incarceration, poverty, and high unemployment rates have a negative impact on lives of Black men (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Smith et al., 2007). When coupling first-generation college students and Black men as one population, they experience more barriers and uphill battles than other student populations. To address their sense of belonging and social and academic needs, researchers have developed many different theoretical concepts. Two of those theoretical frameworks are Strayhorn’s (2012) College Students’ Sense of Belonging and Tinto’s (1993) Student Integration Model of Attrition.

3. Research Design and Methods

To better understand the lived experiences of first-generation Black men at a predominantly White institution, I will be conducting a qualitative research. Qualitative research has been described as a type of research that seeks in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon in a broader context (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This type of research design provides depth, complexity, and integrate both a subjective and intersubjective stance when researching a phenomenon (Allan & Eatough, 2016). Additionally, qualitative research involves a reflexive process that goes through various stages of the research project (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Reflexivity in qualitative research involves observation and reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Attia & Edge, 2017). Qualitative research is an appropriate method of study for my research because it permits me with an opportunity to fully emerge myself in the research, interact with first-

generation Black men, and really understand their experiences at a predominantly White institution. This research strategy would grant me permission to access the rich information that my participants would share with me regarding their sense of belonging on campus and how that has impacted their overall campus integration.

In this research study, I will be using phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenology is considered a tradition in German philosophy and it focuses on lived experiences of people (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Phenomenology research design accounts for the experiences of an individual or group of people, how they have experienced a specific phenomenon, and the way in which people have made sense of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon that is being studied in this research is the intersection of Black men being first-generation at a predominantly White institution. The way in which this is connected to my research is that experiences that are shared with me by participants can be interpreted differently due to me making meaning of those experiences through a different set of lenses. This study is limited to the impact of sense of belonging on the social and academic integration of first-generation Black men at a predominantly White institution. Therefore, in order to better understand that impact, it is important to understand the lived experiences of first-generation Black men through a framework such as interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is designed to enable the researcher to investigate how participants are interpreting their own personal and social world in detail (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Smith & Osborn, 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis puts a great amount of emphasis on the involvement of the researcher in the process of research because it allows the researcher to enter the personal world of

participants (Smith & Osborn, 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis provides a level of flexibility to approach the expansion of phenomena and enables the freedom to explore context (Chan & Farmer, 2017; Miller et al., 2018; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is noted that through the use of hermeneutics approach, interpretative phenomenological analysis aids with an in-depth understanding of an issue in relations to particular group of people, and further explores various nuances of the impact of context on relationships (Allan & Eatough, 2016). Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in my research will guide me toward unpacking the lived experiences of first-generation Black men who are enrolled in a predominantly White institution and provides me with an opportunity to explore various factors that contribute to their persistence and graduation rates.

3.1. Duration of Study

The duration of the study is up to 4 months upon getting IRB approval. The interview process will be no longer than 2 months.

3.2 Study Sites

This study will take place at Rowan University.

3.3 Sample Size Justification

I will be using a purposeful sampling strategy in this because I have a specific reason and purpose for selecting my participants (Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). My targeted population is 10-15 first-generation Black at Rowan University. In purposeful sampling, the settings, participants, and activities are selected intentionally to obtain information that is relevant to the researcher's questions and goals (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, participants in this study are viewed as experts within the

phenomenon that is being studied, which is the intersection of Black men being first-generation and they produce rich experiences that can provide the researcher with the best opportunity to answer the research questions. My participants will have at least 2.5 Grade Point Average who are involved with at least one campus organization because research indicates that retention and college success is passively influenced by out-of-class experiences as well as course-based learning (Beregn-Cico, 2013).

3.4 Subject Selection and Enrollment Considerations

There a total of 297 first-generation Black men at Rowan University. I will be creating a survey and sending it out to all 297 first-generation Black men. The survey will include the criteria that students have to meet. Once I get the survey results back, I will filter my options to individuals who have met the criteria. Then I will select 10-15 people randomly from the eligible pool.

Once the eligible participants have been selected, I will be sending each participant a consent for to fill out. The consent form will include information about the study, the protection of each member of the study, and how their participation is voluntary.

3.5.1 Inclusion Criteria

- Must be first-generation and Black man
- Must have at least a 2.5 cumulative GPA
- Must be involved with at least one club/organization
- Must be a sophomore, junior, or senior
- Must be between the age of 18-23
- Must be a full-time Rowan University student

3.5.2 Exclusion Criteria

- Any student who does not identify as first-generation and Black men because my research focuses on that population
- Any student who do not have at least a 2.5 GPA because I want to focus on students who are in a good academic standing.
- Any student who is not involved with at least one club on campus. I am looking to conduct a study from an anti-deficit perspective. I want to focus on students who are having a positive campus experience and those who are integrated to campus.
- Any student who younger than the age of 18 or older than the age of 24. I want to focus on tradition students.
- Any student who do not have full-time status

3.5.3 Subject Recruitment

The participants of this study will include individuals from various academic disciplines. I will be identifying my participants from a total population of first-generation Black men (297) through a self-reported survey administered by the institution to all students when they applied to the university. I will use the survey results to identify qualified participants. Upon identifying them, I will email the qualified students to invite them to participate in the study. Once I receive a confirmation email from students, I will contact each student directly by email to explain the study, its purpose, and the safeguards to protect the participants in greater detail. Furthermore, I will inform students that their participation in the study is voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any point during the research. I will also provide each student with a consent form that

talks about the purpose of the study, details of the agreement to participate, and the confidentiality of their identity.

Once I have selected my participants, I will inform them several locations in which they can choose from to be interviewed. The location could either take place within participants' residence hall, student center, library, or even off campus.

3.5.4 Consent Procedures

Once my subject has been identified, I will provide each participant with a consent form. The consent form will include information about the study and how each individual's identity will be protected. The subject will sign two copies – one copy for their own record and one copy for the principle investigator. Once the participants agree to the terms, they will sign and date the form. Please see Appendix B for the consent form.

3.5.5 Subject Costs and Compensation

There will not be cost and compensation.

4. Study Variables

4.1 Independent Variables or Interventions

Sense of belonging and academic and social campus integration. The data will be collected from planned interviews and requested documents.

4.3 Risk of Harm

No anticipated risk.

4.4 Potential for Benefit

This study may have some anticipated direct benefit to Rowan University through assessing current practices that are in place to support first-generation and Black students

and to creating new initiatives that can enhance the overall experiences of these two populations. Another anticipated director benefit to Rowan University is developing policies that promote commitment and responsibility to providing all students an opportunity to achieve inclusive academic excellence.

5. Data Handling and Statistical Analysis

I will be using a process and pattern coding method as a way to analyze my data. Process coding provides meaning to various actions using “ing” to describe an action (attending event, belonging to a community, being praised). Patter coding groups different actions and data to form patterns and themes. Then I will create a codebook to identify themes, provide definition of themes, and use direct quotes that speak to identified themes. The interviews will be recorded via a recording device. The data will be secured in my laptop and only the Principle Investigator will have access to it. Once the study is done, I will be destroying the data that was retrieved.

6. Data and Safety Monitoring

The data will be collected and secured in a safe location in the residence of the researcher and no one will have access to data except the researcher.

7. Reporting Results

7.1 Individual Results

I will be providing the participants with a copy of the results upon their request.

Appendix D

IRB Approval Letter

IRB Approval

** This is an auto-generated email. Please do not reply to this email message.
The originating e-mail account is not monitored.
If you have questions, please contact your local IRB office **

DHHS Federal Wide Assurance

Identifier: FWA00007111

IRB Chair Person: Ane Johnson

IRB Director: Sreekant Murthy

Effective Date: 10/22/2019

eIRB Notice of Approval

STUDY PROFILE

Study ID: [Pro2019000544](#)

Title: Exploring The Lived Experiences of First-Generation Black Men At A Predominantly White Institution And The Impact of Sense of Belonging On Their Social and Academic Integration.

Principal Investigator:	James Coaxum	Study Coordinator:				
Co-Investigator(s):	Mir Hatef Alavi Tabrizi	Other Study Staff:	There are no items to display			
Sponsor:	Department Funded	Approval Cycle:	Twelve Months			
Risk Determination:	Minimal Risk	Device Determination:	Not Applicable			
Review Type:	Expedited	Expedited Category:	6	Exempt Category:	7	There are no items to display
Subjects:	297	Specimens:	0	Records:		

CURRENT SUBMISSION STATUS

Submission Type:	Research Protocol/Study	Submission Status:	Approved
Approval Date:	10/22/2019	Expiration Date:	10/21/2020
Continuation Review Required:	Progress Report		
Pregnancy Code:	No Pregnant Women as Subjects	Pediatric Code:	No Children As Subjects
		Prisoner Code:	No Prisoners As Subjects

Protocol:	Tier 1 Interview Protocol - Sense of Belonging Tier 2 Interview Protocol - Campus Integration	Consent:	There are no items to display	Recruitment Materials:	Appendix A - Email Message .docx
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Appendix E

Tier 1 Interview Questions

Introduction

Hello. My name is Hatef Alavi and I am a 4th year doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program, Higher Education track at Rowan University. I am conducting this study under the guidelines of my Chair, Dr. James Coaxum III. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my research study. The purpose of this study is to learn about the lived experiences of first-generation Black men at a PWI. Your participation in this study is voluntary and I am not being paid by Rowan University or any outside agency to conduct this study. This study will consist of two semi-structured interviews. This is part one of the semi-structured interview. During tier one interview, I will be asking you questions regarding your campus experiences and sense of belonging at Rowan University. At the conclusion of the two semi-structured interviews, you will have the opportunity to review the findings before they get published.

Tape Recorder Instruction

If it is okay with you, I will be taping recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can obtain as much information as I can and be able to be attentive to our conversation. I will assure you that all of our conversation will be confidential. That means, I will not be discussing our conversation without your permission to anyone outside of my dissertation. Furthermore, I will be giving you a pseudonym to protect your identity. This interview could last between 45 to 60 minutes and you are in control of the direction of the interview. Although, each question will be used, your responses may warrant more probing questions that would aid with answering the research questions.

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Questions:

1. What attracted you to Rowan University that made you to enroll in this institution?
2. What clubs or organizations are you involved with?
 - a. What made you interested in joining clubs and organizations?
 - b. How long have you been involved with them?
 - c. What has made you to stay involved?
3. How would you describe your social network on campus?
4. Tell me about individuals who have impacted your experience at this institution? How have they impacted your experience?

5. Tell me about a time that mentoring from a faculty or staff impacted your experience at Rowan University?
6. Tell me about a time that you did feel belonged to campus?
7. Tell me about a time that you did not feel belonged to campus? What contributed to you experiencing a lack of belonging? How did you overcome that experience?
8. In what way do you feel supported, accepted, valued, and mattered?
9. What do you need from the institution in order to feel more accepted and connected to this community?

Appendix F

Tier 2 Interview Questions

Introduction

Hello. My name is Hatef Alavi and I am a 4th year doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program, Higher Education track at Rowan University. I am conducting this study under the guidelines of my Chair, Dr. James Coaxum III. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my research study. The purpose of this study is to learn about the lived experiences of first-generation Black men at a PWI. Your participation in this study is voluntary and I am not being paid by Rowan University or any outside agency to conduct this study. This study will consist of two semi-structured interviews. This is part two of the semi-structured interview. During the tier two interview, I will be asking you questions regarding your background and your social and academic experiences at Rowan University. At the conclusion of the two semi-structured interviews, you will have the opportunity to review the findings before they get published.

Tape Recorder Instruction

If it is okay with you, I will be taping recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can obtain as much information as I can and be able to be attentive to our conversation. I will assure you that all of our conversation will be confidential. That means, I will not be discussing our conversation without your permission to anyone outside of my dissertation. Furthermore, I will be giving you a pseudonym to protect your identity. This interview could last between 45 to 60 minutes and you are in control of the direction of the interview. Although, each question will be used, your responses may warrant more probing questions that would aid with answering the research questions.

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Questions:

1. Tell me about your experience at Rowan University?
2. What has inspired you to attend college and to pursue a higher education degree?
3. What academic challenges have you experienced as a first-generation student at Rowan University and what have you done to overcome those challenges?
4. What social challenges have you experienced as a first-generation student at Rowan University and what have you done to overcome those challenges?
5. How would you describe your transition at Rowan University?
6. How has your community back home (Family and/or friends) impacted your success in college?

7. What support systems have you utilized or experienced while in college?
8. How would you describe your study habits in college?
9. What changes have you made to your study habits that have helped you to be more academically prepared in college?
10. How have you immersed yourself into the culture of the campus?
11. How would you describe the campus climate in reference first-generation Black men?
12. What resources do you think Rowan University need to better support first-generation Black men? Please explain.