A Qualitative Analysis: Black Male Perceptions of Retention Initiatives at a Rural Predominately White Institution

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Abstract

In this article, we show that the retention and graduation rate of Black male students at institutions of higher education is dismal when compared to other groups. Approximately, 30% of Black college males who enroll in a four-year institution earn a college degree compared to 57% of White male students (Bohrnstedt et al., 2015). Black men find it difficult to persist and complete a college degree, and reasons behind it should be explored. The purpose of this study is to explore student and administrator perceptions of retention strategies for Black male students attending a Predominantly White Institution (PWI).

Keywords: African American Males, Predominantly White Institution, Student Retention, Rural Education

Introduction

A college degree increases the likelihood of employment, future earnings and personal satisfaction. However, the challenge in earning

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a degree differs based on race, gender and socioeconomic status (Palmer et al., 2014). The United States Congress passed Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to ensure equal opportunity in federally assisted programs and activities (Rudolph, 1990). Thus, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protected persons from discrimination based on race, color, and ethnicity by institutions of higher education (Rudolph, 1990). Although Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) are more racially integrated, Black college males face unique challenges from their White counterparts, which make them the least likely of all students to be retained and earn a college degree (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2014). Roughly, 30% of Black college males who enroll in a four-year institution earn a college degree compared to 57% of white male students (Bohrnstedt et al., 2015) and less than 30% of Black college males remain at their first college (Palmer et al., 2014). Consequently, the number of Black college males who enroll in college and never earn a degree, are limited in their ability to achieve goals that require an earned degree. While there are numerous reasons that contribute to Black college males departing from college before earning a degree, there are visible and present reasons that are beyond the control of Black males. According to Palmer et al. (2014) many Black college males are from racially segregated and predominantly Black communities and attend PWI more than Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU). Black college males who attend school in rural locations may be confronted with additional pressures than Blacks who attend school in urban environments. Consequently, by acculturating to the majority lifestyle and being surrounded by faculty, students, and staff who are from mostly rural areas, the challenges that Black college males face attending a rural PWI may prove to be more than they anticipated. This study expands knowledge to this area of study by exploring an institutional strategy at a rural PWI aimed to increase Black college male retention and graduation. In addition, this study provides a foundation to understand Black college male perceptions of these institutional strategies and perceptions of the rural environment in which they attend school.

Problem Statement

There is a significant amount of literature on college retention strategies designed to prevent college student departure (Astin, 1997). Most of the retention research focuses on the white student population and little attention has been given to Black and nontraditional students (Harper, 2006). Research on Black college students groups all Black students together instead of focusing on Black students heterogeneously. The limited amount of information surrounding Black college male

retention focuses on students who attend HBCUs, which adds to the complexity institutions face when attempting to increase retention rates for Black college male students who attend PWIs (Watson, 2002).

While colleges and universities are implementing programs to increase Black college male retention, the number of Black college male students who depart from college before earning a degree continues to rise (Baker, 2013). It is unknown why retention programs are not increasing Black college male retention, but present studies do not explore the perceptions of these programs from the perspective of its participants. Due to the limited knowledge on Black college male participants' experiences regarding retention initiatives, institutional leaders have a limited understanding on how to increase Black college male retention. In addition, there is a dearth of literature discussing Black college male retention programs at land-grant PWIs located on rural campuses.

The retention initiative explored in this study focuses on the development and retention of Black male undergraduate and graduate students. This initiative is designed to provide an extra layer of support for Black men as they adjust college life. Each month, participants and facilitators of the initiative gather together to discuss various topics related to the specific needs and interests of its participants. Collectively, participants are assigned a professional mentor and graduate student peer mentor to support them in a variety of ways throughout their collegiate journey. Mentors and participants meet for meals, evening/weekend activities, tutoring, and any discussion pertinent to participants college experience. In this qualitative single-case study inquiry, the authors explored the retention initiative in place to better understand the role this ancillary program plays in advocating and promoting the retention of Black college males who attend a PWI located on a rural college campus. Furthermore, the Black college male student and faculty perceptions of the retention initiative are also explored.

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do Black male students perceive the purpose, processes, and effectiveness of a retention initiative aimed to increase Black college male retention?

2. How do college administrators perceive the purpose, processes, and effectiveness of a retention initiative aimed to increase Black college male retention?

3. Are there differences in how Black male students and college administrators perceive the purpose, processes, and effectiveness of a retention initiative aimed to increase Black college male retention?

Conceptual Framework

The Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement (Swail, 2004) is a conceptual framework that describes the relationship between students and the institution they attend. The framework places the student at the center of the model and addresses the questions, "What can institutions do to help each student get through college?"; and, "How can institutions help integrate students academically and socially into the campus, as well as support their cognitive and social development?" The geometric model is shaped like a triangle, which denotes a force or impetus on a student. The three forces account for student outcomes: cognitive, social, and institutional factors (see Figure 1). Cognitive factors refer to what a student brings with him or her to college. The cognitive factors include the academic ability such as proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics. An important component of the cognitive factors related to student persistence is a student's decision-making and problem solving. Social factors are important to a student's stability. The social factors include integration with peers and the institution, cultural history, and personal attitudes. Research shows that social integration is important to student retention and students have a hard time persisting if they are not socially connected to the institution. The institutional factors refer to the "practices, strategies, and culture of the college or university

Figure 1
Geometric model of student persistence and achievement (Swail, 2004)

that impact student persistence and achievement" (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003, p. 77) such as academic and social support, course content and instruction, and student programming. The geometric model places institutional factors at the base of the triangle because the college forms the foundation for student success (Swail, 2004).

The student achieves equilibrium, a term to describe the mode of student persistence, when the forces from all sides (cognitive, social, and institutional) create a balance. If equilibrium is lost, students risk departing from college. The cognitive dimension relates to students' skills, abilities, and knowledge that empower them to succeed in the classroom. Swail (2004) contends that some external forces, such as peers, faculty, and characteristics that students bring with them to college are also considered cognitive factors. The social dimension relates to cultural history, family influence, financial problems, and socioeconomic status. The institutional dimension relates to everything akin to support or hinder students' ability to navigate and succeed in college. Such factors include financial aid, campus climate, support services, policy and practices, campus-wide facilities and diversity initiatives.

Swail (2004) discusses the process of reaching equilibrium in two stages. The first stage represents a series of variables on each side of the geometric model. Each variable has an effect on student persistence, which suggests that one variable can be equally neutralized by another variable. For example, if a student has strong social factors, but extremely low institutional factors, their ability to persist may come with some challenges. However, certain variables can combine and work with or against other variables. The combination of forces or reciprocity produces a net effect for each of the three planes of the geometric model (Swail, 2004).

The second stage refers to the continuation of reciprocity. The forces generated individually or across axes accounts for the stability or instability of student persistence and ultimately the achievement of equilibrium. The triangle does not have to be equilateral in order to reach stability. The model supports student retention when equilibrium is reached. Equilibrium of the model can be reached by an infinite combination of variables from each of the three axes (see Figure 2).

The strength of the geometric model of student persistence and achievement is helpful for understanding the multiple forces that shape Black college male experiences. The model recognizes the role of the institution, student motivation, and personal skills as well as the support of family and peers. Understanding the cognitive and social factors that influence Black college male retention brings awareness to the institution on how to improve institutional practice. Black college males benefit from this geometric model because their needs are placed at the center of the model and the institution has a responsibility to the

success of Black college males. This model is significant to this research study because the primary focus is on the student, contrary to most student-persistent models that place social, cognitive, and institutional factors at the center. Moreover, participants in this study attend a PWI located on a rural campus and some may have entered the university in need of an adjustment period where social, cognitive, and institutional segregation was occurring. Participants discussed their adjustment, if any, to college at a PWI and if the forces (social, cognitive, and institutional) accounted for student outcome and retention. Lastly, membership in the retention initiative is common among participants, and the possible effects the initiative had on participants may help future studies address the significance of this conceptual framework as well as evoke student participant ideas in designing initiatives that serve a specific student population.

Scholarly Significance

Campus-based qualitative research is needed to help institutions identify best practices that aid in retaining Black college men. Most retention programs lack: proven research, specific to the needs of the campus, institutionalized, a strong budget, support and student-centered (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). This qualitative research study draws on the experiences of Black college male students who participated in a

Figure 2
Geometric model of student persistence and achievement (Swail, 2004)
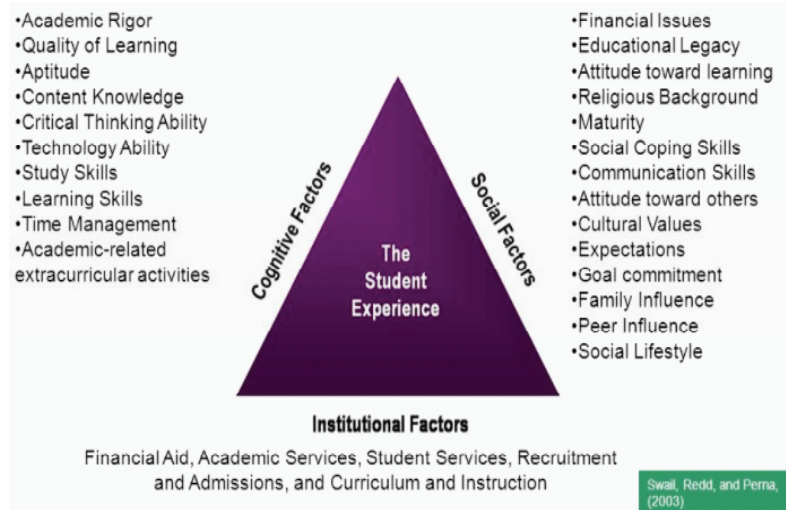
retention initiative. The researchers explored the participant experiences within the retention initiative to comprehend student perspectives concerning the effectiveness of the initiative. The research from this study may aid college practitioners in establishing institutional programs that are specifically tailored to the needs of Black males by considering their perspectives. Black college males are not monolithic and without qualitative research the conversation about Black male retention continues to be too broad. Furthermore, this study may provide faculty and staff valuable insight from the Black male perspectives of their college experiences so that faculty can better assist Black men academically. Consequently, college administrators can better assist Black men by establishing educational practices that are inclusive of Black men as well as institutional programs that increase the engagement of Black men leading to higher retention rates.

Definitions

Effectiveness—the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result; success; a change which is a result or consequence of an action or other cause.

HBCU—a college or university that was originally founded to educate students of African-American descent.

Processes—a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end.

Purposes—the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists.

PWI—Predominantly White Institution is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment.

Rural—characterized by geographic isolated area located outside of cities and town; small population size.

Classical Explanation of College Student Retention

Why students leave college before completing a degree has been a question that has intrigued the minds of theorists and educators for many years. College student retention is a phenomenon that poses problems for institutions and the students who attend. Institutions are affected by the instability of institutional enrollment, budgets, and the overall perception of the quality of the institution (Braxton & Hirschy,

2005). College students are affected by student loans, lifetime earnings, and a loss of human capital (Braxton, 2000). According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2017), 61% of students who started college in the fall of 2015 returned in the fall of 2016. Asian students have the highest retention rate at 72.9%, while Black students have the lowest retention rate at 54.5% (NSCRC, 2017).

Student retention was a modest inquiry until the explosion of student enrollment in higher education after World War II (Berger & Lyon, 2005). President Roosevelt signed the GI Bill in 1944, which provided World War II veterans money for a college education. By 1950, more than two million veterans had enrolled in higher education and by the 1960s student enrollment also increased among low income and minority students (Berger & Lyon, 2005). The sudden growth also meant the departure of students as well. Colleges and universities across the nation were unprepared to serve fast-growing and diverse populations, and by the end of the 1960s many institutions acknowledged student retention was a common concern (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Consequently, the rise of student retention studies increased during this era (Astin, 1977; Bean, 1980; Spady,1971; Summerskill, 1962; Tinto,1975). For the purpose of this study, student retention refers to the process that leads students to remain at the institution they first enrolled (Tinto, 1987).

Some roots or common themes related to students leaving college include student intent, adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, obligations, and finances (Tinto, 1993). Freshmen students are the most likely to drop out of school compared to other classification ranks, and only half of an incoming class graduates within four to five years (Bean, 2001). Bean (2001) suggests there is a typical profile of students who are retained year to year; they (a) enroll in college following high school; (b) attend a four-year private or public university seeking a bachelor's degree; (c) are full-time students; (d) come from a white or Asian family whose parents are educated with high annual incomes; (e) attended a high quality high school; (f) received good grades in high school; (g) scored well on college entry exams; (h) intend to graduate and set career goals; (i) participate in college activities and have a positive attitude towards school; and (j) identify the campus as being a good fit (Bean, 2001). The fewer of these characteristics a student has, the more likely they will depart from college before earning a degree (Bean, 2001). The retention of students is important to institutions because without high retention rates, institutions cannot survive. For years, institutions have looked to theory to understand reasons for student departure as well as to design policies and strategies to support retention efforts. In the following section, I highlight student retention theorists who have shed light in understanding the student departure phenomenon.

Factors Related to Black College Male Retention

Black college males have greater access to college than before, but many are not graduating, and an even higher number withdraw from their first institution. Nearly, 1.2 million Black men are enrolled in college and almost 50% attend PWIs compared to 11% who attend HBCUs (Toldson & Lewis, 2012). However, 70% of Black college males who begin college at a PWI depart before earning a degree (Harper, 2006). Recent literature suggests that the factors related to low Black college male retention are not solely the fault of the institution but are also the result of external factors Black men bring with them to college (Harper, 2006). The narrative for each Black college male who departs from their university is different, yet whatever the reasons, the total number of Black male departures is higher than other student groups (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Consequently, the need for PWIs to focus on understanding the challenges Black college males face is paramount. Retention models have been explored to help increase Black college male retention, but Black college men experience factors that affect retention and graduation completion that are not present variables in traditional retention models.

Retention studies have portrayed Black college male students as disadvantaged, underprepared, and defunct (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper, 2009). Among the studies that have examined Black college male departure, some consistent findings have emerged. As noted by Wood (2012), Black college males were more likely to leave due to family responsibilities (26.9%), program dissatisfaction (23.2%), and other/personal reasons not included among the possible survey responses (21.8%). According to Cuyjet (1997), many Black college males depart because they are underprepared for the academic rigor in higher education due to poor middle and high school systems, low expectations of teachers, peer pressure not to focus on educational attainment, financial hardships, and lack of role models. In addition, Black college males have developmental disadvantages (social, economic, and cultural) that affect their ability to navigate and succeed in college (Cuyjet, 1997). Other researchers have examined other factors, such as student engagement (Tinto, 1993; Harper, 2006), faculty interaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), campus climate (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002), and external factors, i.e., family responsibility (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006) to understand Black college male departure. Most factors that influence Black college male retention can be organized into three categories: environmental, social, and psychological (Strayhorn, 2013). Environmental factors include Black college male's sense of belonging on campus, involvement

in academic and social activities, campus fit, and diverse surroundings. There is a very limited Black (African American) footprint in the rural sociocultural fabric of the state in which this present study takes place. Previous studies indicate Black students experience a difficult time transitioning in campus climates that are different from their home lives and communities (Harper, 2006). Social factors include academic success, positive peer interactions, support from university faculty and staff, engagement in campus clubs and organizations. Psychological factors include self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence, and grit.

Methodology

This study examines the qualitative single case study method that was used to explore a retention initiative designed to increase Black college male retention and academic achievement. The authors offers a rationale for selecting a qualitative single case study method and presents a methodology for this study, description of participant samples, the role of the researchers, and issues of study validity. Finally, a description of data collection tools, method of analysis, strategies to increase credibility.

The primary purpose of this qualitative single case study design is to explore and analyze Black college male perceptions of a retention initiative designed to increase Black college male retention. In addition, we explored and analyzed administrator perceptions of the retention initiative. This study was designed to extend prior higher education practices and explore the perceptions of the retention initiative of students who identity as Black and male. To study the phenomenon of low Black college male retention rates, the researchers endeavored: (a) to explore the perspectives of Black college male students participating in a retention initiative, (b) to draw connections across the participants' responses, and (c) to identify themes of participants' involvement in the retention initiative. Are there differences in how Black male students and college administrators perceive the purpose, processes, and effectiveness of a retention initiative aimed to increase Black college male retention?

Site Selection

The site for this research study takes place in a land grant PWI located in a rural environment. The institution is in a homogenous environment that is built around agriculture and coal. The college resides in a state that has one of the oldest populations of any state. Nearly three-quarters of the state is covered by natural forests. One of the first major land battles fought between Union and Confederate soldiers in

the Civil War took place in this state. Additionally, this state has one of the lowest crime rates in the country.

For this study, a pseudonym, Mid-Atlantic College (MAC), was used to identify the research site. The MAC mission statement is: as a land-grant institution, the faculty, staff and students at MAC commit to creating a diverse and inclusive culture that advances education, healthcare and prosperity for all by providing access and opportunity; by advancing high-impact research; and be leading transformation in the state and the world through local, state and global engagement. MAC is supported by five distinct values:

1. Service—we seek opportunities to serve others and are committed to providing the highest quality of service.

2. Curiosity—we ask questions, seek new opportunities and change through innovation.

3. Respect—we are respectful, transparent and inclusive with each other.

4. Accountability—we perform at our very best every day to create an institution this is responsive, efficient and effective.

5. Appreciation—we support and value each other's contributions as we build ONE community.

Based on the school's website, MAC ranks in the top percentage of public colleges and research universities. MAC has an undergraduate school population of over 28,000. The student racial composition is: 79% white, 4% Black, 3.3% Hispanic, 1.8% Asian, and 7.5% non-resident alien. Approximately, 87.5% of the students attend school full time and 12.5% part time. Approximately, 57% of students graduate within six years.

When it comes to ethnic diversity MAC ranks below average among other four-year institutions. Approximately, 85% of MAC faculty are white. According to the national average, both the student and faculty diversity population are below average. MAC boasts a 40:60 male to female student ratio, which is higher than the national average. About 47% of undergraduate students at MAC are from the same state. Approximately, 79% of students make it past their freshman year, which is well above the national average and 57% graduate within three to six years.

This study explores the perceptions of the retention program aimed to increase Black male retention. The case is located at MAC and has been in existence since January 26, 2015. This case has similarities to other institutions, however, in particular, this case was modeled after a neighboring college retention program. The recruitment of Black male undergraduate and graduate students at MAC is done

through advertisements, such as flyers, emails, word of mouth, campus canvassing, large poster boards in high traffic campus spaces, and local barber shops. Student emails are obtained from the university email list-serve. To gain membership into the program, students complete a membership profile form. There is no interview, review of resume, or academic requirements for students to gain access to the program. The participants are predominantly Black men, although some Hispanic, Native American, and white males participate. The mission of the case is to focus on the development and retention of Black male college students. Each month, participants and faculty and graduate student peer mentors get together to discuss various topics (empowerment sessions) related to participants' needs and interests. Participants are assigned to a mentor to support them through their collegiate journey. The mentors and participants can meet as often as they like, but it is strongly encouraged mentor teams meet on a monthly basis outside of regular scheduled monthly empowerment sessions. On average, there are 35 students who participate in the empowerment sessions each month and meet regularly with faculty and graduate student peer mentors.

Sample Participants

The researchers used a purposeful sampling technique in selecting participants for the study. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling relies on the researcher's judgement when making a unit selection to be studied (e.g., people, cases, organizations, events, or pieces of data). The researchers must identify and select individuals or groups that are knowledgeable about or have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). Prior to identifying and making a selection, the researchers must understand participants' willingness to participate and their ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate and reflective way (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The retention initiative is a program within the Diversity Office. The researchers contacted the director of the Successful M.A.L.E. (Men Achieving Through Leadership and Engagement) Initiative to get a list of names, phone numbers, and email addresses of active participants in the initiative. Participants in the initiative range from freshmen to graduate students. In addition, the director suggested the researchers contact a few recent graduates who were also active members of the retention initiative. In sum, the researchers contacted 20 active members and recent graduates of M.A.L.E. and 10 agreed to serve as participants for this study. Participants consisted of 1 Graduate Student, 4 Seniors, 1 Junior, 2 Sophomores, and 2 Alumni. The researchers hoped that second

semester freshmen would participate in the study, but none responded to voicemails or emails. In addition, the researchers used pseudo names in place of participant names in order to protect the identity of student participants: CW, CA, CT, ER, EW, KE, RD, JD, JM, and SA.

Furthermore, the researchers also explored the administrators' perceptions of the retention initiative. The administrators are the Chief Diversity Office and the Director of the M.A.L.E. The researchers also used pseudo names in place of participant names in order to protect the identity of administrators. The names of the Chief Diversity Officer are Dr. Grayson (DG) and the Director of M.A.L.E. is Mr. Analyzer (MA). Students and administrators received some of the same questions, so that the researchers could build a foundation of how students and administrators perceived the retention initiative. Administrators provided the concept of the initiative and students provided the inception or thoughts of being part of the initiative. The sample pool included classification rank: sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate students, and recent graduates. Each of the participants must have served at least one full year in the initiative. Our intent was to understand the collection of perspectives from students in different grade levels. It was important to understand the perceptions of this retention initiative from both the student and administration viewpoint, so that one group did not influence the other. Moreover, purposeful sampling was important for this study to make sense of how the retention initiative was perceived from participants of the program.

Data Collection

The researchers conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with student participants. In addition, the researchers also conducted 2 separate interviews with both administrators. Qualitative interviews are the chief method the researchers used to collect primary data. The principal method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews with participants averaged to be one-hour in length. The researchers conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews to engage discussion around promoted themes driven by the research questions and conceptual framework. Students and administrators were interviewed, so the researchers could explore how students and administration perceive the case.

The researchers asked students and administrators similar questions, so that parallels could be made about the purpose, process, effectiveness, and influence of the case. Open-ended follow-up questions were asked in addition to the semi-structured questions to give depth and expression to participants' voices. Semi-structured interviews were completed in

one setting. The researchers conducted 12 semi-structured interviews over a three-week period. Semi-structured interviews were each one hour in length. Semi-structured interviews with each student participant were conducted in a private quiet room reserved in the library. The same room was used for each of the 10 student participants. Semi-structured interviews with administrator participants were conducted in their college campus office. Semi-structured interviews were selected so that the researchers would remain open to emergent themes and ideas within a thematic structure. The researchers explored themes and ideas to understand their experiences and assist the researchers in understanding the "what" and "how" of the experience (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The researchers also used document analysis to give voice to the phenomenon. Document analysis is an example of secondary data. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research that gives voice and meaning around a topic (Bowen, 2009). The most common text used for document analysis is written documents (Bowen, 2009). Bowen (2009) suggests that a wide array of documents is important although researchers should also be concerned with the quality of documents rather than the quantity. For this research study, document analysis had the potential to provide contrasts between the administrators' perceptions of the retention initiative and the written documents prepared by the administrators. In addition, the documents helped contextualize the case study and offered opportunities to probe both administrators and students about activities and events pertinent to the retention initiative.

Finally, the researchers used a focus group method to elicit perspectives about the meaning of truth (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Focus group interviews lead to different types of data not accessible through individual interviews (Merriam, 1998). Focus group interviews are typically flexible, unstructured dialogue between the group and the researchers (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Focus groups were a good way to reach data saturation for this present study because semi-structured interviews take place with the same participants as those in the focus groups. Focus groups add a group perspective about the phenomenon that semi-structured interviews do not.

Data Analysis

The case study analysis method requires the researchers to use varied qualitative data sources including individual interviews, document analysis, and focus groups to gain the perceptions of the study participants. Stake (1995) defined analysis as "a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71). Merriam's (1998) definition of analysis is an application of constructivist epistemology.

She defined analysis as "the process of making sense out of the data by consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researchers has seen and read, which is the process of making meaning (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Stake (1995) suggested that researchers should conduct data collection and analysis at the same time.

For the purpose of this research study, the researchers took an exploratory perspective in analyzing data through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is not tied to a pre-existing framework and can be used with different theoretical frameworks. Through thematic analysis, the researchers are able to collect data in relation to the research question. Thematic analysis introduces patterns or themes through examination and recording repeated phrases that are important in describing the phenomenon within the data. The researchers examined and records patterns for the semi-structured interviews and focus group. This approach focuses on the participants perceptions and experiences related to the phenomenon. The most widely used thematic analysis was developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), who created six steps of thematic analysis:

1. Familiarize yourself with the data.
2. Generate initial codes.
3. Search for themes.
4. Review themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Producing the report.

The process of reducing data comes in three stages: the free line-by-line coding of the findings, the organization of codes into related areas to construct descriptive themes, and the development of analytical themes (Aronson, 1995). Coding is the process of organizing a large amount of data into smaller segments (Bailey, 2007). Initial coding or open coding is term for breaking up multiple pages of text into more manageable sections that can later be grouped for the analysis stage (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During this stage, the researchers reads data or listens to the recordings and in turn writes down initial thoughts. Once the researchers became more familiar with the data, it was important to identify preliminary codes. This can be from direct quotes or discovering common ideas and then paraphrasing them. The researchers read every line of data, while understanding some codes will be deleted later and new ones may emerge. The further reduction of data is called axial coding, which is the process of reducing the data by identifying and combining the initial coded data into larger categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

After numerous codes have been found, the researchers identified

all data related to the classified patterns. In conjunction with coding, the researchers also participated in an iterative process called memoing. When memoing it is important the researchers asks questions, pose hypotheses, and sees answers grounded in the data (Bailey, 2009). After coding and memoing, the next step is to combine the related patterns into sub-themes. Themes are derived from patterns like what people say, meanings, feelings, and conversation topics (Aronson, 1995). Themes are meaningless when standing alone but emerge from participants' stories to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience (Aronson, 1995). When patterns emerge between themes, the researchers obtained feedback from participants to gain a clearer understanding and establish other questions for the participant.

To analyze data from semi-structured interviews and a focus group, the researchers used a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which allowed them to bring preexisting research questions to the analysis of the data while also investigating entirely unanticipated themes. Thus, deductive and inductive codes, respectively, were identified and used in the analysis. The questions from the interviews were used to create initial, deductive codes. Then, the transcripts were reviewed to identify themes emerging from the text to create inductive codes. Together, these codes comprised the codebook. Specific text passages relating to the codes were compiled into code reports for analysis. In the results presented here, the participants' quotes are used to illustrate the findings. This data analysis was used to analyze the content of the data collection. Patterns or themes relevant to the participants' experiences and perspectives were identified.

Validity of Research

This research study employs multiple research techniques to ensure validity and reliability of the research. Patton (2002) indicated that studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that method (e.g., loaded interview questions, biased or untrue responses) than studies that use multiple methods (p. 248). The researchers used triangulation to help assemble emerging theories (Creswell, 2012). In addition, the researchers employed member checks. Participants reviewed their responses (member checking) to confirm the findings of the research and received their transcript as a document. They were asked to review and reply if there are any discrepancies. Member checks makes sure the researchers captured a true and honest representation of the participants experience (Creswell, 2012).

The Case: The Successful M.A.L.E. Initiative

The Successful M.A.L.E. Initiative or affectionately known as M.A.L.E. was created under the Diversity Office by MA. It was modeled after the first initiative, M.A.N., which was founded by MA in June of 2012. However, the first initiative did not gain the traction that it needed to be supported by the institution at large. MA and DG enlisted the support of the university president to repurpose and relaunch an initiative for men of color on campus. This new initiative would focus on two main tenets: retention and graduation completion. The other components of the initiative would support the retention and graduation completion for men of color. M.A.L.E would be the first retention initiative built into the fabric of the institution for male students of color. In other words, MAC did not have an institutional history of retention initiatives for men of color. The researchers worked closely with one of the university head librarians to research if the university had other programs that supported male students of color, but after looking through the archives for weeks, we did not discover any documents related to programs for male students of color. This does not suggest that there were not informal programs for male students of color, but there were no documented cases.

With the support of the University President, M.A.L.E was supported by professional mentors, administrators, campus departments, and the Office of the President. Although this retention initiative was not established within the university's strategic plan, the college President has publicly supported the initiative and has been an active participant in monthly empowerment sessions. With the expansion of the M.A.L.E. initiative, the responsibility was now a campus wide effort, receiving support from other departments such as Student Life, Housing and Residence Life, and the Black Culture Center. The M.A.L.E. initiative has struggled to be a data-driven program, yet the interviews with students indicate it has been effective aiding in both retention and graduation completion.

M.A.L.E. meets monthly for empowerment sessions and periodically throughout the year for special events and mentor-mentee outings. These sessions are normally run by MA, professional mentors, and graduate student mentors. The active student participants range between 25–30 for monthly empowerment sessions. There are five to 10 active professional and graduate student mentors who attend the monthly empowerment sessions. In addition to the monthly empowerment sessions, the professional mentors are assigned five to seven students and are encouraged to meet with them monthly. Graduate student mentors are also encouraged to meet with professional mentors monthly to discuss potential at-risk students and prepare for monthly empowerment sessions.

The University

The college campus is in a state in the Midwest, nestled between the Appalachian Mountains and has pristine views of the natural landscape. The state was formed in contention with a neighboring state during the American Civil War. Most of the counties in the state are designated as rural. It is known for logging and coal mining. Roughly, three-quarters of the state is comprised of forests. It is one of the least diverse states in the nation with 93.1% of the state being white (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2008). In addition, it ranks 37th out of 50 of African-American inhabitants. Of its inhabitants, 18.7% have a bachelor's degree or higher (2008). The state is challenged by retention, degree completion, attainment gaps, and enrollment in higher education. This challenge is heightened by the number of high school students who do not enroll in post-secondary schools following graduation. Subsequently, 18.3% of the state population lives in poverty (2008). Historically, the mining and coal industries have been the state's main source of production, and it is also known for outdoor activities, including skiing, whitewater rafting, fishing, hiking, and hunting. The state's population is also aging faster than the U.S. national average. It has a median age of 40 which ranks as the oldest population in the United States (2008). Despite the economic challenges the state experiences, the city where the college is located for this study is ranked by Forbes (2017) as one of the top 10 best small cities in the nation to conduct business. In addition, the college is ranked in the top 150 public universities and in the top 202 best value colleges (Forbes, 2017).

Findings

The findings in this study provide a framework for understanding the need for retention-based initiatives for Black college males, the organizational structure of such initiatives, and how the vision and implementation of the initiative align. These findings support the research questions in this study. The researchers analyzed differences of opinion held by students and administrators. This approach details the common themes within the study as well as any differences so that a complete picture of the findings are shared.

Themes

The identified themes originated from predominant motif coding and were organized in three groups reflective of the components in

the research question 1 and 2—purpose, processes, and effectiveness: Group One (Purpose)—Needs and Obstacles: External and Internal; Group Two (Processes)—Support: Through the Program and Outside the Program; and Group Three (Effectiveness)—Organization: Sense of Family/Community and Ways to Improve the Program. Figure 3 illustrates all themes in this study.

Common Themes and Sub-themes, Within some of the theme are sub-themes that further narrowed and detailed how the participants understood the nature of their respective experience. These were also identified by a careful analysis of the predominant motifs within the experiences of the participants.

Needs and Obstacles, External Needs and Obstacles, refers to broader cultural and institutional challenges that black students face while attending college. They detail the nature of the circumstances of the individuals' outside world such as interactions with others, the institutional environment and family problems. Internal Needs and Obstacles, expand upon the nature of the inner-self and subjective and personal lives of the individuals as they go through college experience.

Support through the Retention Program, expands on how the program in place is perceived by both students and administrators. Support outside the Retention Program, describes resources that students identified as available outside the targeted retention of the initiative designed to increase Black college male retention. Organization, Sense of Family/Community, details students' reaction to the community that was formed because of the initiative and reasons why they remained members. Finally, Ways to Improve Organization of the Program, details students and administrators' perceptions about the logistics that can make the program to function better and any unmet needs an improved program should address. Figure 2 illustrates these themes and sub-themes.

Group One (Purpose): Needs and Obstacles

External needs and obstacles. External Needs and Obstacles,

Figure 3
Themes and Sub-themes
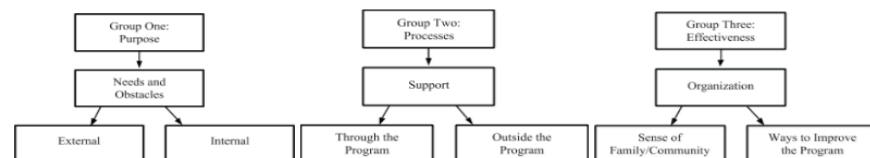
refers to broader cultural and institutional challenges that black male students uniquely face while attending college. For example, participants reported that they felt as "odd men on campus," which made it difficult to connect to the majority white student population. CW said: "Most classes were Caucasians students and roommate was Caucasian (felt alone in class [])." CA noted: "Black male population is very small." CT echoed: "three black males on my entire (dormitory) floor." Participants shared an overwhelming need to connect with other Black males. They were not visible in their dorm rooms, classrooms, or even in public spaces like the student union and cafeteria. For some participants, the lack of other Black males on campus was new and entirely different than what their home communities and school districts looked like. RD expressed:

> I think the challenge of fitting in on this campus because, as a predominantly white institution, year-round cultures is different from what you're used to, what you grew up in. [ ] You hang around people that don't necessarily have the same culture beliefs or views of certain things that you're used to and it's just different [ ] Adapting to new people, different cultures.

KE agreed with RD's expression of the lack of Black students on campus. He said: "As far as me being here, I wish there was more black students, at a [basic] level, I wish there was more black students, that's all." There is a need for Black college male students to be around and interact with other Black college males. While the number of Black college males on campus is small, there is still a visible number. However, many Black college males are spread out on such an enormous campus leaving rare opportunities for them to connect. MA shared because Black college males have rare opportunities to connect it was important to create a program that brought them all together. MA shared:

> So, having this opportunity, I think for people at a predominately white institution creates this safe, this comfortable space for students of color to be able to debrief, to be able to talk about their experiences, their struggles, their concerns, their issues, their successes.

The participants further elaborated on race related, cultural issues that affected them while in college. They talked about working through the cultural differences, fighting "Black Male" stereotypes, dealing with white privilege, as well as about general difficulties with finding appropriate support from family members. Below are examples that illustrate each of these issues.

Participants talked extensively about the necessity to work through cultural differences and obstacles that affected the Black community as opposed to the white student population. KE reflected:

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> I think that is the case, a lot of times we think that [as Black males] college isn't for us. But I also think one the flip side of that, with Black males, we see all these other ways to make it. The primary ways and sometimes our primary role models are actors, rappers and ballers. So it's like, "I don't know how to act so I'm going to gear towards rapping and balling." It's easier, these days, to get your stuff out there.

Many of the first-generation participants also expressed how many of their high school peers took jobs out of high school instead of attending college. The idea that "college is not for us" was a reoccurring theme among some of the participants. Culturally, they were not raised in a community that pushed attending college. While some of them were encouraged by their parents, many of their peers did not subscribe to the thought that college would be beneficial. Instead, the chased dreams of becoming athletes and rappers, which is entirely different from the cultural upbringing of their white counterparts. KE further explained:

> The black community, especially for black men, has become obsolete or non-existent to the fact that black men often find different ways (other than college) to secure and find their own niche not centralized in our community of black resources.

JD remarked:

> A lot of black males come from high schools that are inadequate and don't prepare them the best for college. It's a natural thing that happens based on the way our laws and things like that are set up. They don't know they're behind and they come in thinking with a good attitude, "I'm ready to do this." But really, they're already 10 steps behind. They're going to be working hard, harder than the man next to them, when they get here.

Participants shared that when they arrived at campus they realized that their Black community had not properly prepared them academically and socially for college, especially a PWI. When they spoke with their white peers about the communities in which they grew up in, they quickly realized that culturally Black males entered college lacking the academic and social support their white peers received. In addition to cultural obstacles, participants expressed the need to work hard to live outside the "Black Male" stereotype. There are a number of Black stereotypes that participants expressed, and some are: all black men are athletes, all black men are not intelligent, and all black men are aggressive and competitive. CT explained:

> They [whites] could start taking down some of those stereotypes. Because all these students come from different backgrounds. They don't know what black people are like, they haven't been around black people. If their first experience with them or interaction with them, is them dressed

nicely, and carrying ourselves the right way, that can help knock down some stereotypes and make for a better campus overall.

CT alluded to the notion that Black men enter college with these stereotypes. They step foot on campus and immediately they have been judged and marginalized. This reality is an up-hill battle for Black men as they attempt to navigate the terrains of a PWI. RD agreed with CT about being placed in a stereotypical box as a Black man on a predominantly white campus who is seeking the same experience as his white peers. RD shared:

I think, as athletes, they put us in this box of, "you're just a stereotypical black athlete." Trying to live outside of that is definitely a challenge. They weren't really accepting towards the fact that I was a black person looking for extra help. I was kind of tossed to the wayside. And I was also a football player, so a lot of the flack that I caught was "you guys have everything over there so you don't need it." So whether I caught flack because I was on the football team or because of my skin tone, I'm not sure.

The stereotype of being an athlete does not help Black men navigate the campus environment. White peers and faculty do not take Black college men seriously because they assume the majority of Black men are accepted to college to play a sport. Black college males who are not athletes are treated as if they were athletes, and not taken seriously in the classroom. Thus, the stereotype to be aggressive and compete emerges. This "double-edged sword" rudely affects the Black male experience on campus. KE commented on RD's experience as an athlete:

The fact that it's a double-edged sword as far as motivation and healthy competition. I think we also- we try too hard to impress each other. Sometimes, this crabs in the barrel mentality, people have it but, man, black people is crazy this crabs in a barrel mentality that we have. How we feel the need to [say:] "You went to Miami last year? Alright, I go three times a year. They like to flex with the '03 Benz just because it got the emblem on it. It's like a flip to the axis. How do we successfully compete versus just competing and bringing each other down at the same time?

One reason Black college males have to work harder than their white peers are because of the new college culture they have yet to learn, the number of white peers and faculty who do not take their college aspirations seriously, and as KE echoed, many Black males feel they have to compete with one another in order to be successful. This idea of having to "flex" in all accounts perpetuates aggression and competition. KE alluded to how unhealthy having to "flex" is. There is so much heavy lifting that needs to take place for Black college men to compete at

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similar levels as their white peers. Black college males are not doing as well academically as their white peers and institutions must be mindful of the barriers that stand between Black college males and academic success. And once those barriers are defined, the proper measures need to be in place to aide Black college males in their success.

Participants shared that family responsibilities impact their ability to focus on academic work as well as keep them close to home. MAC University was not the number one college choice for any of the participants. Some wanted to attend smaller, private colleges but did not get accepted. Other participants wanted to attend an HBCU, but MAC University was closer to their homes and families then were the HBCUs. Retention programs need to account for special circumstances related to the students' family lifestyle, since many African-American students come from economically, disadvantaged communities. Participants discussed their external needs and obstacles and they also mentioned their internal needs and obstacles that impacted their college experiences.

Internal needs and obstacles. Internal Needs and Obstacles details the inner-self and subjective and personal lives of the participants as they go through their college experience. Two closely related major points emerged within this theme: Lack of Motivation and Lack of Role Models. Participants repeatedly addressed the sub theme Lack of Motivation as an important problem. For instance, SA noted that "some black males come to college without a clear focus." He then continued: "I kind of think of it as it's a lack of motivation. What ya'll are saying how it's a competition, I think we need that more in our communities, so it keeps us all intrinsically motivated because that way, it's something we pursue." KE echoed SA and shared:

> That intrinsic motivation thing you said before was so valid. I'm not saying an 18 year old or a 19 or 20 year old is irreversible as far as their attitude. But once you've been doing stuff that has been built into you for over 15 years it's hard to change that in a few weeks of talking to somebody.

Participants mentioned that Black males have a lack of motivation because they do not see other successful Black males graduating from college. In addition, there are few Black men working in higher education who would inspire and motivate Black men to do well. So, the need for intrinsic motivation is imperative, and if Black males do not develop it or bring it with them to college, they run the risk of dropping out. But the how to develop intrinsic motivation is why retention initiatives are important for Black males. DG shared:

> I think a little bit of a problem with this (retention initiative), is that it was a little social, a little academic. As opposed to being kind of a

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mandatory. So you had self-selection. And what so often you have with self-selection you have the most motivated that will do it and many times those that need it the most really don't realize it until they're in it a couple or three years down the road.

Most of the participants in this study expressed having intrinsic motivation. While this is positive, they represent just a small percentage of Black males on campus. Because of the obstacles that Black college males face on campus, having a retention initiative that is not mandatory usually attracts students who are intrinsically motivated. However, the many Black college male students who have not developed intrinsic motivation are left out of the retention initiative. Moreover, the initiative aides the students who self-select to be part of the program, but it does not help those who may need it the most. Self-selection has a limited number of Black college males involved in M.A.L.E. to help Black college males develop motivation to do well, it is paramount that the initiative find ways to reach more Black college male students. Aside from lack of motivation, participants agreed the lack of mentors and role models in their lives made their involvement in M.A.L.E. purposeful.

Participants' journeys to college did not come from mentors or role models from home. CA explained: "There was no real mentorship and our parents didn't graduate college and even through struggling, found ways to take care of us." JD agreed: "Mentorship is a common thread here at WVU. It doesn't really exist in the black community. [ ] They tend to not be able to find mentorship through core development processes of college." MA expressed:

A big part of the initiative is to create community among other men of color, to allow for strong and genuine networking and role-modeling and mentoring with professional staff. All of those pieces are important because most men of color have not had this prior to the initiative.

Participants explained that one of the purposes of the initiative was to provide mentors and role models that would help Black college males reach success in college. EW expressed:

Without this initiative, the university would have a hard time retaining African-American males or African-American students, period. This initiative, gives students mentors and role models. And for many of us, this is the first time we had a mentor who looked like us guiding us.

SA echoed:

Some of us don't come from the best situations. It's tough for a lot of people, but the M.A.L.E. initiative worked with me where I was and gave me the support I needed. It's tough. People have the emotional support of their families, but it all depends on the type of support they get in college that makes all the difference.

JD agreed:

> As a first-generation student, the guidance alone was cumbersome. It was intimidating to think about. So, stepping foot on campus, I was fortunate enough to do a program called Academic Stars program, which is sort of a transition program for first-generation African-American students on campus. You spend six to eight weeks on campus, really learning the campus, figuring out what your place is here at WVU, figuring out what your place is here at WVU as an African American, and connecting with mentors that guide you along the way.

Participants external and internal needs properly align with the purpose of the retention initiative. They shared obstacles they faced prior to college and after stepping foot on campus. Thus, the creation of the retention initiative helped to mitigate some of these obstacles and guide students to the proper resources. The next theme that developed was Support, which properly aligned with the processes of the retention initiative.

Group Two (processes): Support Through the Program

Support Available Through the Retention Program reflects students' and administrators' perspective on what the program was able to offer Black males on campus. All participants recognized that the retention program at the very least is aiming to address the common obstacle of low retention and graduation rates of Black males on campus.

JD explained: "For me, it was a breath of fresh air to have people that look like me and wanted to have the same amount of success or same type of experiences while they're in college or after college." SA agreed:

> I like the M.A.L.E. initiative because, at the simplest form, it's motivational. You see people that's similar to you and really excel and be the best man they can be. You don't get to see that many places, especially on this campus. Seeing other black men close to your age out there trying to make a name for himself academically, whatever the case may be. It's empowering, honestly.

KE echoed the support the initiative provided:

> It's definitely given me an avenue to some of the professors and administrators, faculty and mentors that I still have and I still keep in contact with to this day. The good thing about it is it's nice to see all those black guys there (empowerment sessions). It feels good. More people to talk to. And if it's a small group, it's more intimate, so you can have those tougher conversations.

RD commented:

> That (retention initiative) gives you a sense of belonging, especially for a lot of people. Most of us are first generation college people, to have a sense of belonging to an organization or a group who make you more comfortable here and your experience a lot better.

Participants agreed that the initiative provided them support in several ways. Although, all participants come from different backgrounds and have different needs, the common theme was they all felt supported through the initiative. For some, sitting in room with other Black college males every month was the support they needed. And for other participants, the initiative was the only space on campus where they felt a sense of belonging and a safe space to be themselves.

CW described the monthly meetings as "sessions away from school where men could meet up and talk about things that affected the lives of Black men." He also thought that this was where the program was the most efficient, "the initiative is extremely effective for what the initiative was to do: Discuss personal issues; Black male students on campus personal relationships with black faculty and staff (because most faculty students I have are white). [ ] It was great to connect with other African American leaders on campus."

Sometimes the discussions addressed frustrations and challenges that students faced. Participants mentioned that M.A.L.E. was the only safe space on campus to discuss sensitive topics without feeling marginalized and most importantly accepted. CT referred to initiative meetings as times when "group members coming together to voice opinions, frustrations, challenges…" to be "very effective."

ER characterized the program as "enlightening (always learning something), opportunistic (always faculty and leaders there to speak with), fulfilling (seeing other brothers who care about the future of their lives)."

EW agreed with other participants:

> I was looking to observe the program to pour in to others and be part of a sense of community or brotherhood to express ideas and concerns. The initiative was a community! It was a support group of men who could challenge my thinking and I could challenge their thinking. The initiative provided opportunities to provide support and a safe place for Black college males.

JD thought about the support within the initiative as a "Place to vent; place where he could make jokes and others understand," where people are "Looking after you as a person." KE highlighted the support of the initiative was "to create a safe space for men of color to discuss all topics and academics, [ ] to facilitate growth, [and provide the] support

system." RD also saw the program as giving an "opportunity to black men on campus (students and non-students) to network, come together and talk in a safe environment."

SA described the initiative as a "help group (support group), [where you can] remain true to yourself." It gives "support through speakers brought from the outside," and "events (once/month) provide extra motivation."

All participants agreed that one of the greatest strengths of the initiative was that it provided support for Black college males. The initiative served as a haven for many participants and the only space on campus where they could intentionally be around other Black college males and discuss topics that were of interest to them. Members of the administration also emphasized that creating a strong support system for Black college males was one of the main goals. DG saw the main initiative functions as "structured to be a place where it was a social outlet and grooming for leadership; [a place to] come together and see other successful people.

MA shared:

> The initiative was formed to create community among other men of color, to allow for strong and genuine support, networking, role-modeling and mentoring with professional staff. I'm a strong believer that when you support students by connecting them to something on campus that they can be involved in (outside of the classroom) then they become passionate about school and the likelihood to retain them increases.

The support within the initiative encouraged participants to remain active members of M.A.L.E. and receive the type of support they needed to persist. Participants also mentioned receiving support outside the program, which aided in their persistence and academic and social pursuits.

Limitations

This study investigated the perceptions of a retention initiative aimed to increase Black college male retention and graduation completion. During this study, the researchers provided descriptive accounts about the lived experiences of a retention initiative based on the stories and reflections of the participants. This study advanced the knowledge of the Black college male experience by addressing the unmet needs of Black college males and acknowledge ways to aid them in their pursuit of excellence through retention and graduation completion. As we reflected on the entirety of this research study, we were extremely pleased with the results, experience, and knowledge gained. However, while reflecting on the enormity of this project, we recognized limitations that should be acknowledged.

Although we do not consider ourselves a limitation, we recognize that as Black males researching Black male students, we are privy to cultural nuances and lived experiences that could influence our connection with the data. In our attempt to maintain the integrity of the data, we constantly checked in with the participants to be certain we provided an accurate account of their stories. While, our presence as Black males does not discredit the study, it would be meaningful to know what the outcomes of the study would be if white men or women served as the researchers.

The location of this study took place at a land-grant PWI located in a rural environment. The experiences of the participants in this study are specific to this school. However, it would be important to examine the experiences of Black college males who attend PWIs located in suburban and urban environments. Some of the cultural artifacts that participants revealed were not accessible to them in this rural environment would be available to them in other geographical locations. Thus, the outcomes of the study may be different. Furthermore, the demographic of the study included Black college men attending a PWI, but if the study included Black college men attending a HBCU, this may show deeper comparisons between Blacks at PWIs versus HBCUs.

All participants were active members of the retention initiative. Their participation helped the researchers construct a better understanding of the purpose, process, and effectiveness of the initiative. However, it is important to know the experiences of Black college males who do not participate in the initiative. How are they able to persist year to year without being part of the initiative? If these men are at the brink of departing from the college, what do they need to persist and graduate? These limitations were not intentional, but they are important to highlight.

Implications

This study highlights the experiences of Black college male students who attend a PWI located in a rural environment. While this study is not a representation of every Black college male students' story, the data provided identifies knowledge beneficial to Black college male development. This timely study is about self-awareness, purpose, processes, effectiveness, adaptation, and development. The researchers attempted to explain the experiences of Black college male students without deviating from their raw accounts and personal stories about college, retention and programs. This study outlined the importance of programs for Black college males that aimed to help them develop and grow in unfamiliar spaces. Based on the data provided, educators, faculty,

and administrators should discuss ways to engage Black college males in multiple spaces on campus that promote their well-being, academic aptitude, social integration, and retention. This study should also prompt parents to engage in conversations with institutions about ways to aid Black college males in addition to ways parents can best support them from afar.

Conclusion

This study was a project that began based off our personal journey through higher education and later gained momentum and support from scholars who research student injustices and the outcomes of those injustices as experienced by students and the institution at large. Through this study, the researchers had the privilege of sharing space with Black college male students who not only aspire to earn a college degree but have ambitions to return to their communities and inspire other Black males to consider college as a realistic, attainable option.

This study does not provide all the answers to the plight of Black men in higher education. Nor does it provide a new theory to help educators create intentional programs or practices that would lead to increased retention efforts for Black college males. Rather, this study is an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon—retention initiatives aimed to increase Black college male persistence. The hope is that the creators of retention initiatives recognize that Black men are not monolithic, and their voices are imperative in designing programs that are tailored for them. In addition, retention initiatives serve as incubators of opportunity and in these spaces are Black males influenced to embrace the culture of the institution, join student organizations, partner with other peers, and develop positive, working relationships with faculty. The impact and influence retention initiatives have on Black college males is essential for their success.

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