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FOSTERING SENSE OF BELONGING: A MULTI-CASE STUDY OF BLACK MALE  
RETENTION INITIATIVES

By

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B.S., Texas A&M University, 2009  
M.Ed., Texas A&M University, 2013

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Education of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, & Organizational Development  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2018

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A Dissertation Approved on

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation, one of my greatest works in life to date, is dedicated to the memory of my loving mother, Pamela Denise Druery (d. February 20, 2009).

Thank you for providing me with a strong foundation, for preparing me for life and to do this work, for having full faith in my ability to achieve great things, for sacrificing so much of yourself for me, and most of all, for teaching me to believe in God. I am who I am because of you. Your whisper to me that Sunday in church, “Dr. Druery sure does sound good” has been etched in my heart and mind and has sustained me throughout this journey, especially during the times I doubted myself and wanted to throw in the towel. I love and miss you tremendously.

You are forever in my heart!

Rest in God’s power.

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“...two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference. (Frost, *The Road Not Taken*)

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## ABSTRACT

### FOSTERING SENSE OF BELONGING: A MULTI-CASE STUDY OF BLACK MALE RETENTION INITIATIVES

Jarrod E. Druery

April 24, 2018

The retention and graduation rates of Black male collegians continues to be a work in progress for colleges and universities in the U.S. Researchers have highlighted impediments to student success and degree attainment of this population at historically White institutions (HWIs)—with racism being prominent. As a result, recent efforts have been made to promote success and persistence among Black men in college. Within the last decade, Black male initiatives (BMI) have emerged on college campuses across the country. BMIs are programs aimed at increasing persistence and success among Black male collegians. Based on the newness of these initiatives, there is a limited body of research that explores their impact on students.

This qualitative study explored the experiences of 15 Black males engaged in BMI programs at three different public institutions: St. Matthew University (pseudonym), Hudson University (pseudonym), and Gaines University (pseudonym). The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which BMI programs impact the educational experiences of Black male collegians at HWIs. Using a multi-case study design, I conducted focus group interviews at each university and gathered program documents from the three BMI programs to construct three single, bounded cases. I intentionally centered the voices and perceptions of students in this study, while using program documents to provide context to student narratives to answer the research question. The

conceptual framework of sense of belonging was chosen to help guide the findings of the study.

Data analysis revealed themes within each case relative to how each program enhanced the participants' student experience and sense of belonging. These themes varied among each case, so a cross-case analysis was conducted to further investigate the similarities and differences among the programs. From this analysis five themes emerged: 1) Connecting Black Males and Creating Brotherhood, 2) Providing Opportunities for Growth and Development, 3) Acquiring Support and Skills to Navigate College, 4) Boosting Persistence, and 5) Creating a Safe Haven. Each of these themes was discussed based on student narratives in efforts to explain how these programs collectively increased sense of belonging for the participants in the study. The data analysis revealed that each of the BMI programs while their approaches may have been unique, each of the programs accomplished their mission and purpose to promote persistence and student success among the participants. These BMI programs are a testament of the positive outcomes Black males can experience through their engagement in safe, affirming spaces where they can build brotherhood, receive holistic support, gain college navigational skills, and undergo growth and development. These BMI programs also serve as examples of productive and effective ways to usher sense of belonging, student success, and persistence among the Black male collegians.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

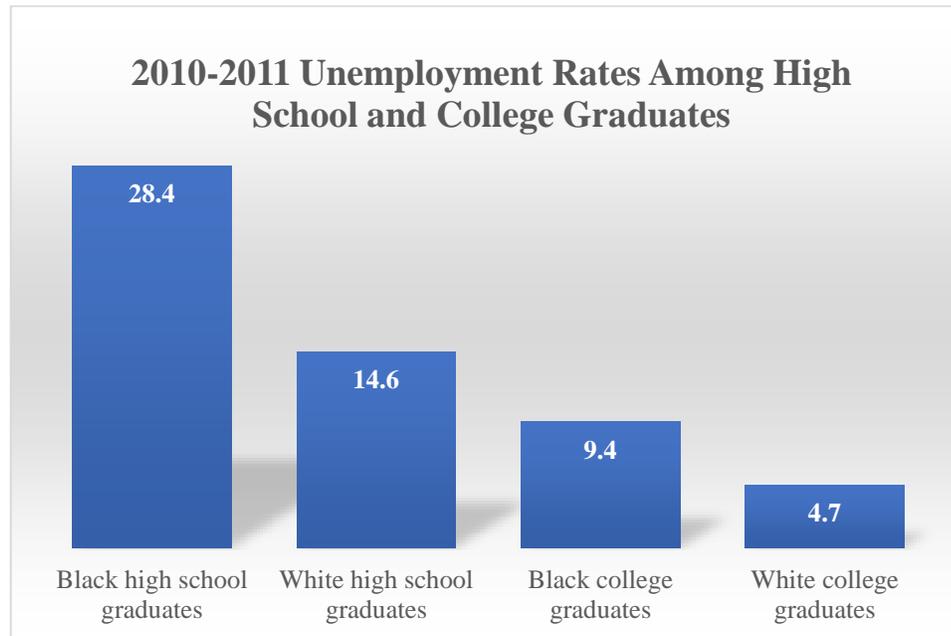
In the U.S., higher education has been touted by some as the *great equalizer* based on notions that a college education will provide remedies and equity for populations who have been historically oppressed and marginalized by providing greater educational and economic opportunities (Growe & Montgomery, 2003; Howard, 2013; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). This sentiment is often shared with Black youth, particularly Black males, as an incentive for attending college. However, during the National Urban League's State of Black America Town Hall in May 2017, a panel composed of: Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, Georgetown University professor and author; Angela Rye, attorney and political analyst; Touré, culture critic and journalist; Symone Sanders, political strategist and former national press secretary for Senator Bernie Sanders; Jeff Johnson, journalist; Angela Sailor, political consultant; and Paris Dennard, political commentator, demystified this notion arguing that higher education is no longer a guarantee of success for young Black people attending college. As Symone Sanders explained:

Education is no longer the great equalizer because there are young people like myself who went to a really good school and we came out and could not find jobs. So no longer can we continue to tell our kids [to] put [their] head down, you buckle down, you do your work, you go to school, you'll be able to get a good job and your life will be successful (Sanders, 2017).

This statement points to the structural inequities that Black college students and graduates face in college and when searching for jobs after graduation. Based on national data

Gould and Cooke (2016) found that the unemployment rate among Black college graduates is 9.4% compared to 4.7% for White college graduates, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Unemployment Rate and Post-Recession Peak Unemployment Rate by Race and Educational Attainment.



Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of basic monthly Current Population Survey microdata.

These data reveal that for Black college graduates obtaining the same amount of education as their White peers, does not create equality in employment or job attainment. Moreover, these data indicate that race, discrimination, and unequal access to opportunities that secure employment are at play. Although higher education may not live up to being the great equalizer that many have praised it to be, attaining a college degree has both short and long-term rewards. Ma, Pender, and Welch (2016) reported that the advantages of obtaining a college degree include: higher earnings; a great chance of being employed; upward movement on the socioeconomic ladder; and a healthier

lifestyle. Therefore, it is important for individuals, particularly Black males, to attain a college degree.

Research on the educational experiences of Black male collegians has increased over the past 20 years and become an important area of research (Brooms, Goodman, & Clark, 2015; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Palmer et al., 2014). Black male collegians face societal, academic, and cultural dilemmas atypical of other college students that threaten their success (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008); some of the challenges include: underrepresentation (Davis, 1994; Palmer et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2010); feelings of isolation (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2013); stereotype threat (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001); and gendered racism and hyper-surveillance (Smith et al., 2011). These challenges are specific to historically White institutions (HWI; see Kim, 2002), which are colleges and universities that, upon inception, admitted only White students until laws and policies were established to allow enrollment of Black and other racially minoritized students. Additionally, Black males are subject to financial hardships, not knowing how to effectively navigate the campus environment, and in some cases, lack of resources and support. The aforementioned challenges tend to impede the enrollment, academic achievement, persistence, engagement, and college completion of Black males (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2016; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008). Brooms et al. (2015), argued that these challenges also impact the ways in which these students encounter aspects of their college experience. For example, stressors arise from these challenges and have been found to impact Black male identity development and relationships (Bridges, 2011; McGowan, 2016).

Black men's low college persistence, engagement, and graduation rates are among the most important and complex issues in higher education (Barker & Avery, 2012; Harper, 2012). Several scholars have argued that the population of Black males in higher education has encountered a major decline (e.g. Cuyjet, 2006; Howard-Hamilton, 1997; Palmer, Davis, Moore, & Hilton, 2010). While most racial and gender groups have experienced impressive increases in college enrollment, Black male matriculation has remained stagnant (Strayhorn, 2008). Overall, Black males persistence to degree completion is disproportionate as compared to White students, Black females, and other racially *minoritized* groups (Barker & Avery, 2012; Harper, 2012). When Black males matriculate into college, they are more prone to begin their journey at two-year community colleges rather than four-year colleges and universities (Strayhorn, 2013), which adds additional layers to the complexity of the Black male pursuit of a bachelor's degree. Harper and Harris (2012) posited that only one out of every three Black male collegians graduate with their undergraduate degree within six years of their initial matriculation, which is supported by national data. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), only 33% of first-time, full-time bachelor's degree seeking, Black males graduated within a six-year period. This percentage is low compared to 65% of White females, 60% of White males, and 43% of Black females within the same time frame. Therefore, approximately 67% of all Black men who enter higher education do not graduate within a six-year period, which is the highest drop-out rate across both sexes and all racial groups (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2013).

According to the College Board (2016), between 1990 and 2010 the percentage of black females age 25 to 29 who attained bachelor's degrees nearly doubled from 12% to

23%, while the percentage of black males of the same age range with bachelor's degrees only increased from just 13% to 16%. These alarming numbers highlight the seriousness of what many in higher education refer to as the *Black male crisis* (e.g. Cuyjet, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Jackson & Moore, 2008) and in some cases the *shame of higher education* (e.g. Ellis, 2009). Based on the college experiences and inequities Black males face, Brooks et al. (2013) argued for a complete overhaul of the approaches colleges and universities take in serving these students. Moreover, Harper (2009a) stated that institutional negligence is blame for some of the issues plaguing Black males. Bearing this in mind, institutions must become more serious about Black male college access, academic achievement, engagement, retention, and graduation rates. Researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, and other stakeholders have an opportunity to devote time and effort to ensuring Black males are successful and not further marginalized within higher education and the larger society.

Researchers have argued that one step in reversing the unfavorable collegiate experiences of Black males is for college campuses to become environments that intentionally support Black males, cultivate their potential, improve their academic achievement, and enhance their college experience (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Brooms, 2016; Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). In the same manner, several scholars have called for programs and initiatives that focus on increasing retention of Black male collegians, often known as Black male initiatives (BMI; Cuyjet, 2006; Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms et al., 2015; Harper, 2012; Harris, 1991; St. Léger, 2012). BMIs can be defined as male-centered programs designed with a focus on retaining and improving the overall college experience of Black males, including their

academic achievement, engagement, and graduation (Brooms, 2016; St. Léger, 2012). Barker and Avery (2012) contended that institutionally-supported Black male-centered programs provide Black male collegians, especially those who attend HWIs, with services tailored to address the specific needs of these students. According to St. Leger (2012), there are specific barriers to implementing and assessing the success of BMI programs at HWIs, which include well-established cultures, traditional forms of governance, and inequitable structures. Campus climates also serve as a barrier to the success of these programs; all of which hinder institutionalization of BMI programs to ensure their stability and longevity. However, institutionally-supported BMIs offer opportunities for theory development, research, and practice, which will allow institutions to create similar experiences for Black males across the nation (Barker & Avery, 2012; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

### **Ways to View Black Male Collegians**

**On Being Black: The Racial Marker.** The terms *Black* and *African American* have emerged as racial markers to classify people of African descent residing within the U.S., many of whom were brought to this country as slaves in the early 1600s through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As Philogène (1999) stated:

To understand the formation, elaboration, and communication of these two social representations, it is important to begin with the positioning of race, a key structural element centrally located in [U.S.] society to organize and direct interaction between the groups. By acknowledging race as a central component, it becomes possible to look meaningfully at the contexts out of which the terms

Black and African American emerged, and to understand the major differences between these two representations (p. 2).

As slaves and their descendants were granted citizenry over time, racial terms were designated by White-Europeans to identify people of African descent. Furthermore, a wave of social, freedom movements in the U.S., including the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement, strongly impacted individuals of African descent in this country (Philogène, 1999). These movements brought social and political transformation for the African descendants, resulting in individual and collective identity and pride. As Philogène (1999) stated, “the Negro became Black, and in the process the new name for the group became for the first time a catalyst for a positive group identity crystallized” (p. 1). The emergence of the term Black produced empowering slogans such as “Black is beautiful,” “I’m Black and I’m Proud,” and “Black Power.” While these terms served as a form of pride for Black people, they seemed to challenge mainstream culture and thus were seen by some as radical.

In the wake of this new positive group identity, race continued to be used as a legal demarcation to stifle Black people in this country as demonstrated through “separate but equal” and other Jim Crow laws. According to Philogène (1999) unlike individuals who voluntarily migrated to this country, Black people were marginalized based on racial categorization and unable to fully integrate into the dominant culture; nor were they able to reconnect to their African culture that was eradicated by slavery. The group designation or term of African American emerged in the 1980s (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005) upon the failure of Affirmative Action and with the presidential

campaign of Jesse Jackson (Philogène, 1999). This distinction was an attempt for further integration and inclusion into “America.”

With time, different meanings and attachments have evolved regarding the terms Black and African American. One explanation for this could be the struggle of dual consciousness W.E.B DuBois (1903) spoke about in his book, *Souls of Black Folk*. Dual consciousness refers the constant tension inhibited by Black Americans, which yields complexity in identity of this group (Philogène, 1999). While the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, there are larger distinctions between them. According to Agyemang, et al. (2005), the term Black broadly refers to people with African ancestral origins. The term African American, primarily used within U.S. contexts, refers to people of African ancestral origins who self-identify or are identified by others as African American. Since most African Americans in the U.S. originated from sub-Saharan Africa, the term is not applied to Africans from northern African countries such as Morocco (Agyemang, et al., 2005). In addition, there are cultural and historical distinctions between African Americans and other African descendants who migrated to the U.S. from Africa or the Caribbean in the 20th and 21st centuries. Although both terms are often used interchangeably, regardless of their differences, both are subject to being problematized. Categorizations of African descendants in the U.S. such as Black and African American hide the huge heterogeneity within these groups (Agyemang, et al., 2005). For the purposes of this study, the term Black will be utilized in hopes to be more inclusive of a wider population of programs and students in which they serve. This study does not seek to lump all Black males together, while ignoring the unique characteristics among each of them.

**Critical Race Theory.** According to Delgado & Stefancic (2001), Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an accumulation of scholarship focused on examining and reconstructing the interplay of race, racism, and power. Tate (1997) accredited influential scholars Derrick Bell, Ricardo Delgado, and Kimberlé Crenshaw as essential contributors to CRT. CRT began as a movement in the legal system but has since been adopted by other disciplines such as education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007; Tate, 1997). In an effort to advance educational research and theory concerning issues of race, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate first introduced CRT to the field of education in 1995 (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Milner, 2007). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that race was undertheorized in education and that although research examining race existed, education as a discipline lacked the conceptual and analytic tools to properly address and operationalize race in efforts to advance the field of education.

The basic CRT model consists of five elements including: (1) centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and nationality; (2) challenging dominant ideologies and re-centering marginalized perspectives; (3) commitment to social justice; (4) valuing experiential knowledge; and (5) being transdisciplinary in research (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Milner, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), *storytelling* and *counter-storytelling* become essential to CRT research which attempts to challenge and uproot deleterious narratives of individuals and communities of color. Solórzano et al. (2001) distinguished the use of CRT in education from other disciplines arguing that the field of education attempts to simultaneously foreground race and racism in research

while challenging traditional paradigms, methods, literature, and problematize rhetoric on race, gender, and class by demonstrating how these social constructs jointly impact people of color. Furthermore, the CRT research in education concentrates on the gendered, racialized, and classed realities of individuals of color and provides emancipatory and transformative methods for examining racial/ethnic, gender, and class discrimination (Solórzano et al. 2001). CRT provides insight, viewpoints, and means for researchers to recognize, study, challenge, and transform the structural and cultural forces that perpetuate dominant and oppressive racialized phenomena (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Solórzano et al., 2000; Tierney, 1993). Therefore, CRT embodies the trait of social activism as it seeks to not only understand our social conditions, and how society positions itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform them for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

For the purposes of this study, I employ CRT and its basic tenets to: (a) highlight the pervasive nature of race and gendered racism in our society and higher educational system and how these constructs impacts the experiences of Black male collegians; (b) name and challenge dominant ideologies while re-centering the marginalized voices of Black males in higher education; and (c) value the experiential knowledge of participants in the study. As a researcher, CRT informs my approach to this research and how the experiences of Black male collegians can be viewed. Additionally, CRT demonstrates my commitment to social justice and being interdisciplinary in my approach to exploring the experiences of Black male collegians who participate in BMIs on historically White college campuses.

**Anti-Deficit Perspective.** Harper (2012) conducted the National Black Male College Achievement Study which introduced the anti-deficit achievement model. The anti-deficit model is an informative perspective on how Black males maneuver the college environment and other educational environments in the face of obstacles and threats to their success. This perspective was a departure from what scholars refer to as “deficit literature,” which primarily focuses on the disadvantages and shortcomings of Black males that cause them to “lag behind” other students (Harper, 2010, 2012; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). The deficit model has contributed to many studies that asked why Black males categorically performed poorly, in addition to yielding improper understandings of Black men in college. Deficit literature provides potential implications as to why higher education has not been able to successfully address the unfavorable experiences and low retention and college completion rates of Black males. According to Harper (2009a), the anti-deficit perspective disturbs: (1) the discourse and blame placed on students for a lack of ambition, academic readiness, learning skills, and/or backgrounds; (2) the emphasis on stereotypical traits attributed to being disadvantaged and poor; and (3) certain educational approaches like remedial courses and interventions all focused on “fixing” the student. “Instead of always striving to fix them, I argue that institutions can learn much from Black male achievers about what worked well, which could guide institutional efforts to engage more Black men” (Harper, 2009a, p.148).

The anti-deficit approach in literature seeks to learn from Black males who are successful, socially and academically. This approach identifies how students persist, their history of engagement and leadership, the support networks of institutional agents and supporters they have, and development throughout their college career. In addition

to the positive emphasis on Black males, anti-deficit literature holds institutions accountable for their role in student success (Harper, 2009a, 2010, 2012; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Harper (2009a) contended that colleges and universities can discover more about the keys to Black male success by collecting qualitative insights from students who have been successful in college. For example, rather than highlighting data on why few Black men take advantage of academic and student support resources on college campuses, an anti-deficit approach would perhaps identify and examine Black males who utilize campus initiatives and services. This will allow researchers and institutions to determine the stimulus for Black male engagement, which could help to engage seemingly otherwise disengaged students. According to Harper (2009a), the strength of anti-deficit literature is that it rejects deficit-based strategies, while simultaneously sensing the steady need for improved support for Black male success. For this reason, the current study is approached from an anti-deficit perspective and will intentionally highlight the success and achievement of Black males participating in BMI programs. Likewise, this study will identify institutional impediments to Black male success and show ways in which BMI programs help them overcome these challenges.

### **Persistence and Retention Defined**

The terms retention and persistence are often used interchangeably within the world of higher education. While these terms are related, the scope of and approach taken for each one is distinctly different. Retention, by definition, is an institutional-based phenomenon of graduating students after initial enrollment at a college or university (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2013). According to Tinto (1999), there are several factors that affect retention including: a welcoming environment, student

morale, and institutional processes. Persistence, on the other hand is defined as an individual desire and action of students to remain enrolled in college from initial matriculation to degree completion (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2013). Based on these definitions, retention is an institutional goal, while persistence is a student decision. Put another way – Renn and Reason (2013) argued that institutions retain students, while students persist toward a specific goal. This distinction is an important one to understand, as it differentiates student decisions and institutional efforts. This differentiation is exemplified by Harper (2009a) as he called for a shift in the responsibility of educational outcomes from students to institutional actors. Throughout the duration of this study, both terms will be used to explore the ways in which institutions intentionally focus on retaining and supporting the success of students, as well as ways in which students are motivated to progress toward achieving their education goal of graduation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which BMI programs impact the educational experiences of Black male collegians at HWIs. This purpose was achieved by centering the narratives of Black males within BMI programs. Hearing and assessing how Black men make meaning of their on-campus experiences can reveal pertinent insights to improve their student success (Brooms et al., 2015). These narratives provided rich data to explain the nature and impact of BMI programs from the perspective of participants. This study was guided by the following research question: “how and in what ways do Black male initiatives impact student experiences at three historically White institutions?” This question helped to proffer anti-deficit narratives on

Black males in college. Lastly, this study sought to provide examples of Black male-centered retention programs and critical aspects that can serve as benchmarks for creating and sustaining retention initiatives for Black male collegians. This study addresses an understudied topic of research and attempts to add to the growing body of literature on BMI programs. Additionally, this study also builds on extant literature concerning the educational experiences of Black males in college.

Although a great deal of attention has been aimed at investigating the issues facing Black men in higher education, P-12, and society (Brooms et al., 2015; Brooks et al., 2013; Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Harper 2009b, 2010, 2012; Howard, 2013; Smith et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008), it is of utmost importance that research continue to explore ways in which these students are marginalized and faced with obstacles throughout their educational journey. Through these explorations, Black males, their experiences, and their perceptions can be better understood. Moreover, these explorations help us understand how these students are successful despite any impediments that threaten their achievement. By doing this, we will learn suitable and relevant ways to support Black male collegians, while genuinely creating spaces where their success is limitless.

### **Significance of the Study**

Research which explores BMIs and how they impact their Black male participants is a fairly new area of research; with a majority of studies exploring student-led BMIs and initiatives associated with national organizations or programs beyond higher education (e.g.; Brooms, 2016; Zell, 2011). Currently, three studies that have examined institutionally supported BMI programs at HWIs (e.g. Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms et al., 2015; St. Léger, 2012); therefore, more empirical research is needed specifically

focused on retention initiatives that are institutionally created and supported (Barker & Avery, 2012; Ellis, 2009). Barker and Avery (2012) was the first study to differentiate between institutionally-based Black male programs and student organizations in efforts to explore the impact these programs have on Black male engagement and persistence. Institutional support refers to how colleges and universities design, implement, provide funding, set aside resources, and provide structural support for retention programs and initiatives. St. Léger (2012) found that Black male collegians benefit from institutionally supported programs that are properly funded and appropriately structured; this allows students to better adjust to college, positively engage with the college environment, excel academically, and persist toward graduation.

As institutions around the nation strengthen their efforts to undergird Black male collegians and the number of BMI programs increases accordingly, it is important that research is conducted to explore the ways in which these programs impact their participants. It is also beneficial to assess program outcomes as it relates to students and what students gain from their participation in these programs, which this study seeks to achieve. Based on the unique challenges faced by Black males on historically White campuses highlighted in prior research, this study intentionally focuses on how BMI programs at HWIs impact their Black male participants. The intentional focus on institutionally supported BMI programs is essential to prompting conversations focused on holding institutions more accountable for improving the educational success and experiences of Black males. Harper and Kuykendall (2012) argued “praiseworthy are institutions that assume responsibility for Black male student success and commit

themselves to reversing problematic trends that persistently disadvantage this population” (p. 29).

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of the current study, the following definitions are operationalized based on their common use and foundational reliance:

**Academic integration** – the extent to which students become incorporated into a college or university based on interactions and relationships based on learning and in-class activities.

**Academic success** – “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 5). For the purposes of this study, I build on this definition by adding actively utilizing resources and effectively navigate students’ respective campus, and persist toward graduation.

**Anti-deficit framework/perspective** – a perspective that seeks to identify, highlight, and learn from minoritized students, particularly Black males who, in spite of being traditionally labeled as intellectually deficient and inferior, have been successful in their educational endeavors. This perspective explores students’ persistence, engagement, support networks, and development throughout their college career. This perspective rejects deficit-based strategies, while simultaneously centering the continual need for improved support for student success.

**Black male collegians** – college students of African descent who identify as male. Although the term Black is commonly interchangeable with African-American,

this study intentionally uses the term Black to be inclusive of all males throughout the African diaspora who reside in the United States and/or attend historically White institutions in this country.

**Black male initiative (BMI)** – academic and social programs aimed at fostering integration into colleges and universities, as well as increasing retention and overall success of Black male college students.

**Brotherhood** – a shared, sense of identity that creates feelings of togetherness, trust, and community among men (Brooms 2017, Jackson, 2012).

**Critical Race Theory (CRT)** – this theoretical perspective investigates and reconstructs the interplay of race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) to show how the lives of people of color are impacted on a daily basis (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007; Tate, 1997). One goal of CRT is to advance research and theory concerning race, and this is achieved through storytelling and counter-storytelling (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

**Historically White institution** – a U.S. college or university originally created to educate White elite males that continued this legacy until legislation was passed to allow enrollment of Black and other racially minoritized students (see Dancy et al., 2018; Kim, 2002; Thelin, 2004).

**Persistence** – an individual desire and action of students to stay enrolled in college from initial matriculation to degree completion (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2013).

**Resilience** – the increased probability of success in school and other achievements in life, despite circumstantial adversities (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994).

**Retention** – an institutional-based phenomenon of maintaining enrollment of students after their initial matriculation at a college or university (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2013)

**Safe space** – an affirming environment created for self-expression and community building, that offers alternative notions of what it means to be Black men and offers critical support for Black male student success (Brooms 2016, Brooms et al., 2015, Strayhorn, 2008; Solórzano et al., 2000)

**Sense of belonging** – a student’s sense of identification or positioning in relation to a group or college community (Tovar & Simon, 2010), which becomes of heightened importance in specific social environments where individuals might be made to feel unwelcomed, isolated, alienated, or invisible (Strayhorn, 2012).

**Social and cultural capital** – acquisition of knowledge, resources, and networks that help individuals navigate social life in ways that lead to increased personal efficacy (Brooms et al., 2015)

**Social integration** – the extent to which students become incorporated into a college or university through contacts between peers based on classroom and extracurricular activities.

### **Organization of the Document**

This study is organized into eight individual chapters. The current chapter, Chapter One, provided a brief introduction into the study including the background,

purpose, and significance of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of literature and research focused on retention and persistence models, the collegiate experiences of Black males, and what is currently known about BMI programs. In addition, Chapter Two presents an overview of the conceptual framework of sense of belonging. In Chapter Three, I describe the methods used to approach, collect, and analyze the data chosen for this study. Chapters Four, Five, and Six present in-depth descriptions of each of the three cases selected for this study. In addition, these chapters include the major thematic findings for each BMI program in relation to the research question. In Chapter Seven, I provide a cross-case analysis comparing the major findings and unique aspects of each the three cases. Lastly, this study concludes with Chapter Eight, which presents a discussion, implications, and an overall conclusion.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review existing literature focused on the collegiate experiences and retention of Black male undergraduate students. Included in this review, is an exploration of the various factors that influence the experiences and success of Black male collegians at HWIs. I begin this literature review by discussing college aspirations of Black males to disrupt narratives that these students are not motivated to or capable of attending college. Next, I introduce models of retention and persistence that are foundational to higher education and student collegiate experiences. Relying on additional literature, I present various critiques and shortcomings of these models presented by various scholars. Based on the overarching critiques of these early retention and persistence models, I introduce nuanced cultural perspectives of retention which are more germane to the plight of Black male collegians. Since the focus of this study is based on Black males attending HWIs, I specifically focus on and present research that has examined the Black male collegian experience at historically White institution-types and the factors that influence these experiences including campus climate, racism, and the effects of racism. When exploring the collegiate experiences of Black males, researchers agree that involvement has positive outcomes of increasing sense of belonging, retention, academic achievement, and ultimately graduation of students (Astin, 1999; Barker & Avery, 2012, Brooms et al. 2015; Dancy & Hotchkins, 2015; Strayhorn, 2008). Therefore, student involvement literature is presented in this review of literature. Student involvement has various forms for Black males including: cultural organizations, fraternities, and newly created BMIs; thus, each of these areas are addressed in this

literature review. Next, I discuss the conceptual framework, sense of belonging, which was chosen to guide the current multi-case study. Synthesis of each previously mentioned areas of research offers critical insight into the experiences of Black male collegians attending HWIs as well as the inner-workings of BMI programs intended to create positive college experiences and increase persistence to graduation. Lastly, a summary of key findings from this literature review is presented.

### **Retention and Persistence Models**

**Early Models.** Student retention continues to be at the forefront of objectives and research in higher education (Flowers, 2004; Harvey-Smith, 2003; Tinto, 1987). More students depart higher education without completing their degree than those who remain (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Tinto, 1987). As a result, colleges and universities have invested a great deal of time and resources on recruitment to increase the number of applicants and students who enroll. According to Tinto (1987) institutions have launched into retention programming as a result of findings from research and examples of favorable retention practices. However, attempts to increase student retention are not simple (Tinto, 1987), and there is much for institutions to consider in what Braxton (2000) refers to as the *student departure puzzle*. According to Braxton (2000), students' college experience and the meanings students make of these experiences are salient in understanding student departure. Early retention scholars suggested that students' decision to leave an institution is a result of the interaction between individual characteristics and institutional factors (see Astin, 1975; Bean, 1980; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Although factors such as aspirations and goals, social and academic integration, faculty interaction, and engagement have been identified as factors impacting

student retention, certain populations like Black males continue to be retained at lower levels (Flowers 2004-2005, Simmons, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008). Consequently, several scholars have expressed concern with the transferability of early retention theories to Black males (see Flowers, 2004-2005, Guiffrida, 2006; Harvey-Smith, 2003; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

According to Berger & Lyon (2005), the 1970s sparked the dawn of college student retention literature. In 1975, Vincent Tinto presented his revolutionary student integration model, which is largely cited in college retention literature (Braxton, 2000; Guiffrida, 2006; Museus, et al., 2008; Simmons, 2013). Tinto (1975) postulated that academic and social integration into college campuses is based on students' level of commitment to their personal goals and respective institution, both of which are said to influence students' decisions to persist toward graduation. For instance, as students' level of academic and social integration increases, the higher the student's level of commitment to persisting and finishing college (Braxton et al. 2014). The Interactionist Theory is a three-phase progression of persistence through which students experience separation, transition, and integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993). The theory suggests that in order for students to become socially and academically coalesced students must: 1) separate and distance themselves from their cultural background, practices, beliefs, and values; 2) transition to and become familiar with the culture of their institution; and 3) integrate and assimilate into the campus culture present on their campus. Based on Tinto's theory, the implication for racially minoritized students is that they must detach from their cultural beliefs, values, and practices to assume those of historically and predominately White college campuses (Museus, et al, 2008; Tierney, 1999).

Tinto's theory offers a sociological perspective highlighting the social structures and forces which have an impact on student persistence (Braxton et al., 2014, Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). Tinto's theory is based on the early work of Spady (1970, 1971), who was one of the firsts to attempt to discover explanations for student departure (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Swail et al., 2003). Spady (1970) identified five variables attributed to social integration and students' decision to leave school: academic potentiality, normative congruence, academic performance, intellectual development, and peer support. Spady (1971) introduced a model of retention, which underlined the interplay between individual student traits with components of campus environments. Spady's work is note-worthy because it was the first to combine, at that time, existing empirical findings into a unified framework (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Spady based his model on Durkheim's 1961 groundbreaking theory of establishing social support systems to reduce suicide (Demteriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Swail et al., 2003).

As student matriculation in higher education began to decline by the end of 1970s, retention literature grew as many colleges and universities incorporated retention into their strategic plans (Demteriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Astin (1975) introduced a model of student involvement, which theorized how students develop throughout college. Astin's model includes three variables which influence student persistence toward graduation: 1) demographics and pre-college experiences; 2) campus environment and student experiences during college; and 3) student traits such as knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. In 1980, Bean conducted a study which revealed the salience of background traits in student departure. Bean (1980) found that prior academic performance, socioeconomic status, distance from home, and student satisfaction all influenced student

departure from colleges and universities. This study also posited that men and women leave institutions for different reasons (Bean, 1980). According to Berger & Lyon (2005), Bean revised his model to include how peer influence impacts college student persistence. Bean's work (Bean 1982, Eaton & Bean, 1995; Bean & Eaton, 2000) advanced the work of Tinto, while providing a psychological perspective of student retention and persistence derived from the scholarship of Ajzen, Fishbein, Bentler, and Speckart; these researchers theorized that a strong relationship existed between student behaviors, attitudes, and intentions (Eaton and Bean, 1995; Swail et al., 2003).

According to Bean (1982), student retention and graduation could be predicted by pre-college measurements, such as high school rankings and scores on standardized tests. However, Bean argued that these models were limited in scope because their outcomes were focused on admission strategies rather than retention. Furthermore, Bean (1982) suggested that descriptive models of retention are limited because the linkage of variables may not be fully known or understood. Eaton and Bean (1995) revised previous models of student departure to incorporate coping mechanisms and demonstrate how students adapt to campus environments. How students cope is dependent upon the situation, time, and individual familiarity and comfort (Eaton and Bean, 2000). According to Bean and Eaton (2000), characteristics that students hold at the onset of their college entry mold student perceptions of college environments and their resulting interactions yield psychological processes that influence students' motivation. These psychological processes consist of: positive self-efficacy, declining stress, increasing efficacy, and internal locus of control; all of which lead to academic and social integration, institutional fit and commitment, intentions to persist, and persistence. This model provides a visual

representation of how individual psychological processes impact student persistence (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

**Theoretical Shortcomings.** Although the earlier models of retention are widely cited, serve as a foundation for what we know about retention, and provide an explanation for student departure for certain populations, several scholars have condemned many of them for failing to be applicable to certain groups and types of students (Braxton et al., 2014; Tierney, 1999), especially racial minorities (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Museus, et. al., 2008). Rendón et al. (2000) argued that early, predominately White retention scholars began researching student retention prior to students of color gaining greater access to higher education. Therefore, dissonance can occur for students when encouraged to assimilate in order to persist in historically White cultures not originally created for them. The suggestion that students of color must detach from cultural background and assume the responsibility of becoming integrated into college campuses is the major critique of Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory. As argued by Tierney (1999), students do not simply shed their cultural background upon arriving at college. Tinto's model "is not applicable to non-White college students because the model was designed to explain development within one culture instead of integration from one culture to another" (Guiffrida, 2006, p. 451). Therefore, scholars have advocated for nuanced, culturally relevant approaches to student persistence and retention for minoritized, students of color (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus, et al., 2008; Tierney, 1999). To build from previous work, these new approaches and theories must include cultural perspectives (Guiffrida, 2006). As articulated by Tierney (1999):

Rather than view the academic world as a place into which students need to fit and assimilate or face intellectual suicide, this explanation views the academy as ripe for reinterpretation and restructuring. Not only must students fit into the academic culture, but educational organizations must also accommodate for and honor students' cultural differences (para. 16).

A different approach to examining persistence and student success among college students is involvement (Astin, 1999; Museus, et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2008). Astin (1999) defined student involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy a student commits to academics. Based on Astin's definition of involvement, a student could be considered highly involved students by the amount of time studying and attending activities to reinforce learning. Astin's (1999) Involvement Theory stated that the greater a student's involvement, the greater their satisfaction, both of which positively influences their persistence toward college completion. Additionally, Astin posited that involvement happens across a spectrum, and therefore, students exhibit different levels of involvement than others and levels of involvement fluctuate at different points throughout a students' college career based on several factors such as student motivation, environmental forces, and student experiences. Astin (1999) further stated that involvement among students, measured quantitatively or qualitatively, impacts the level of personal development experienced by students. Astin centered students within the process of learning and suggested that college administrators and faculty have an important role in increasing both involvement and persistence of college students through various activities and opportunities (Museus, et al., 2008). Results from Astin's (1999) study indicated that engagement with faculty and in student organizations were

associated with greater educational success. Astin’s involvement theory serves as a “more culturally neutral framework” for understanding persistence and graduation among racially minoritized college students (Museus et al., 2008).

While the revised work of both Tinto and Astin acknowledge that institutions play a role in student retention, those in higher education have continued to be fixated on student responsibility (Rendón et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993). By including cultural aspects to retention models, counter-narratives will be offered that challenge deficit perspectives on the achievement and success of Black students. Thus, researchers focusing on the college experiences of Black students, particularly Black male collegians will realize that college success or failure are not simply byproducts of individual or group shortcomings, exceptions, or singular variables.

**Cultural Perspectives of Retention.** Martin (1992) offered three perspectives to comprehend culture and its multiple influences on students within groups and subcultures: integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. Particularly the differentiation and fragmentation perspectives demonstrate that within groups there are differences which allow members of the same group to vary in their values, attitudes, and interpretations. As shown in Figure 2, Kuh and Love (2000) advanced Martin’s (1992) postulation by also advocating for using a cultural perspective to examine minoritized student departure and offering eight cultural propositions said to influence student persistence.

Figure 2. Cultural Perspectives on Student Persistence

Cultural Perspectives on Student Persistence	
1.	The college experience, as well as the decision to leave college, is predicated on the cultural meanings students make.
2.	Students’ cultural background indicates the salience of attending college and attaining a college degree.

3.	Knowledge of a student's cultural background is imperative to comprehending a student's ability to favorably negotiate the cultural milieu of an institution.
4.	Student persistence is inversely related to the distance between a student's cultural background and an institution's culture of immersion.
5.	Students who navigate a wide cultural distance must adapt to the dominant culture of immersion or engage in one or more cultural enclaves.
6.	There is a positive relationship between the length of time spent in one's culture of origin after initial enrollment and cultural stress, and consequently the likelihood of persistence is reduced.
7.	The probability that a student will persist is associated with the extent and level of their sociocultural connectivity to an academic program and affinity groups.
8.	Students who join one or more enclaves in the culture of immersion are more likely to persist, particularly if achievement and persistence are valued within the group(s).

Source: Adapted from "A Cultural Perspective on Student Departure," by G. D. Kuh & P. G. Love, 2000. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle* (p. 201).

These propositions present more complexity to understanding student retention and persistence, and in some ways, they conflict one another. However, it is essential for institutions, practitioners, and researchers to comprehend the ways in which cultural influences impact students and their cultural enclaves (Kuh & Love, 2000). To add to the complexity of cultural perspectives of student retention and persistence, is what critical scholars refer to as *intersectionality*. According to Kuh and Love (2000), students belong to several affinity or cultural groups, within these groups are many layers of culture, and the power of these groups and layers of culture vary. Employing cultural perspectives when exploring the collegiate experiences of Black males provides opportunities to foster greater sense of belonging, retention, and college completion among this population.

Museus (2014) developed the culturally engaging campus environment (CECE) model. The CECE model underscores the ways in which students can experience culturally relevant, supportive college environments that boost their sense of mattering. Additionally, the CECE model asserts that students engaged in culturally engaging campus environments are more likely to: a) exhibit a greater *sense of belonging*,

favorable academic dispositions, and increased levels of academic performance, and b) ultimately persist toward graduation (Museus, 2014). Museus identified nine indicators of CECEs: 1) cultural community service (students are offered spaces and tools to give back to and positively transform their cultural communities); (2) opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement (positive and purposeful interactions with peers from other backgrounds that foster a positive impact on college experiences and success); (3) humanized educational environments (institutional agents who care about, are committed to, and develop meaningful relationships with students); (4) proactive philosophies (faculty and staff make extra efforts to bring information and support to students); (5) cultural familiarity (opportunities to connect with individuals with whom they share common knowledge); (6) culturally relevant knowledge (opportunities for students to cultivate, sustain, and increase knowledge of their cultures and communities); (7) collectivist cultural orientations (collectivist as opposed to more individualist cultural orientations); (8) culturally validating environments (validating students' cultural backgrounds and identities); and (9) availability of holistic support (provide students with access to one or more faculty or staff members that will provide them with information, help, and support they need). Collectively, these indicators are interrelated and provide students of color with opportunities to rely on their cultural wealth to garner success in higher education (Museus, 2014; Solórzano et al., 2000).

### **Black Male Educational Experiences**

**Pre-College Experiences.** According to Howard (2013) many of the threats that afflict Black males span back as far as birth and continue over time, including disproportionately high infant death rates, growing up in extreme poverty, and being

concentrated in underfunded schools. Many of these social ills persist into teen-hood and adulthood, which have a deleterious impact on the Black male population. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) found that Black males are more likely to be subject to being reared in crime-plagued neighborhoods, becoming victims of homicide, and becoming susceptible to several of the challenges that plague communities of lower socio-economic status. After examination of national data, Howard (2013) concluded that Black males experience high levels of unemployment, incarceration, poor health, and resultantly lower life expectancy in comparison to other U.S. subpopulations. Furthermore, negative, and often popular, depictions of Black males undeniably impact the ways in which the broader society perceives this group. More unsettling is how these depictions become internalized and influence how Black males view themselves, which can play a role in their academic and social success (Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011).

Davis (2003) posited that in the early years of childhood, subtle stereotypical notions related to Black male cognitive capacity, behavior, and life outcomes are conveyed to Black males from teachers, other students, and media. As contended by researchers, Black males are frequently stereotyped as gangsters, thugs, drug dealers, and criminals that are aggressive, ferocious, ignorant, and lazy (Hung et al, 2011; Palmer et al. 2014; Smith et al. 2007). Undoubtedly, these views become internalized and lead Black boys to believe (1) they are not capable of excelling academically and (2) that classrooms are not spaces where they belong (Palmer et al. 2014). This is made evident by the fact that nationally an overwhelming majority of teachers are White. In fact, Palmer et al. (2014), found that approximately 90% of P-12 teachers are White, and of that percentage, most are women. With an absence of Black teachers, it is of no surprise

that Davis (2004) concluded that Black boys do not have a strong sense of belonging in P-12.

Furthermore, data reveals a great deal of Black males attend inner-city schools with limited resources, outdated facilities, and high teacher turnover (Schott Foundation of Public Education, 2015). According to researchers, certain schools that Black boys attend do not have the resources to provide gifted and advanced placement (AP) courses (Davis, 2004; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1997). In schools where advanced courses are offered, Black males are one of the subpopulations least likely to take and pass AP courses and exams (College Board, 2016). Teachers in these inner-city schools are often unprepared, inexperienced, uncertified, culturally ignorant, and racially unaware (Davis, 2004; Fergus, 2009; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Lewis et al., 2010; Palmer et al., 2013; Palmer et al., 2014). Consequently, Black males are educated by teachers who are unsuitable to meet their educational needs and often engage in culturally incongruent curriculum and pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Palmer et al. 2014). In addition, Brown and Davis (2000) and Davis (2004) posited that schools fail to meet the social and development needs of Black males. As stated by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Tate (1995), culturally appropriate pedagogy encourages academic engagement as teachers incorporate aspects of students' culture into their teaching and instructional practices.

Added to these circumstances, teachers and administrators tend to approach Black boys with remarkably lower expectations than other students. For instance, Museus et al. (2010) maintained that teachers express significantly higher expectations for Asian and White students compared to Black students. These lower expectations have an impact on

the psyche of Black male students as they are presumed intellectually inferior (Allen, 1992; Museus et al., 2010; Palmer et al., 2013). Additionally, these expectations materialize in deficit-based, counterproductive approaches employed to school Black males (Howard, 2013; Palmer et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2007). Unfortunately, based on these ineffective approaches Black boys are overwhelmingly classified among students with disabilities and overrepresented in exclusionary discipline and special education programs; all of which have a positive correlation with the number of White teachers in schools (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Palmer et al., 2013; Palmer et al., 2014; Rendón & Hope, 1996; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Black male students receive much harsher punishments (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) for offenses that are less severe than those committed by their peers (Dancy, 2014; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). These in-school punishments contribute to further socialization of Black males toward the U.S. criminal justice system as well as what scholars refer to as the school-to-prison pipeline (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

At the high school level, the placement of Black males in special education programs substantially impacts their educational trajectory and is one of the factors that thwarts their persistence toward graduation (Davis, 2004; Davis & Jordan, 1994). Over the past 30 years, the SAT and ACT scores of Black males in high school were dramatically lower than their White, Latino, and Asian counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Participants in Palmer et al.'s (2013) study indicated that they would have felt better prepared for college had they increasingly experienced Black male teachers in their educational journey. This perspective expressed by the young men in Palmer's study who had already been accepted to college confirmed what extant literature

underscores regarding the impact of Black male teachers serving as role models, mentors, and sources of support and inspiration (Davis, 2004; Fergus, 2009; Thompson, Warren, & Carter, 2004). In fact, Davis and Jordan (1994) discovered that students' sense of self and belonging is enhanced by school curriculum and positive interactions with peers, teachers, and parents. This finding, thus, provides a means to enhancing the educational experiences of Black males in P-12 and beyond.

The aforementioned impediments facing Black males not only impact their educational experiences in P-12, but they also influence their collegiate experiences and life thereafter as well. Contextualizing the societal and educational backdrop of Black males, helps us better understand Black males, their current state in higher education, and how to provide them with the best educational experiences. "...These are the very children that deserve the best the nation's educational system has to offer" (Rendón & Hope, 1996, p.11). Rendón and Hope (1996) further argued that instead of giving those students who need the best, we give the least and our lowest expectations. This notion is in unison with anti-deficit views of Black males. Rather than focusing on self-imposed perspectives of why Black males lag-behind their peers, the purpose of this and other anti-deficit literature is to shift the burden of Black male achievement to our educational system, as the forces that impede their success are structural. As advocated by Fenning and Rose (2007), the U.S. educational system should (1) recognize the environmental and societal factors that yield Black males among the lowest performing subgroups academically, and (2) more importantly, acknowledge the extent to which it exacerbates inequities by incorrectly meeting the needs of Black male students.

**Black Male College Aspiration.** According to the Schott Foundation (2015), Black males in the U.S. have been thrust into a far too dim light compared to the reality of what they offer to their families, communities, and country through leadership, labor, civic engagement, and scholarship, to name a few. Despite this dim outlook on Black males often depicted through deficit thinking and dominant societal views, this population has historically shown great interest in attending college (Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Noguera, 2003). Currently, “there are over two million Black male college graduates and over one million enrolled in college today” (Schott Foundation, 2015, p. 6). Yet, the idea of completing a college degree for many young Black males is an uphill battle (Harper, 2013; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008) based on the systemic deterrents affecting Black males in key systems like education, labor, and justice (Schott Foundation, 2015). These systemic deterrents are telling of the true problem impacting Black males rather than them viewed as a problem.

**Black Male Student Success.** There are numerous definitions of student success due to its innately subjective nature (York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015). For example, Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Kayek (2006), defined student success as “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance” (p. 5). For the purposes of this study, I restructure the definition provided by Kuh et al. (2006) to redefine student success as actively utilizing resources and gaining knowledge necessary to excel academically and socially, effectively navigate college, and persist toward graduation.

Discourse on student success among Black male collegians finds its foundation from well-known, highly-regarded scholar Walter Allen (Harper, 2009; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Strayhorn, 2013). Allen (1992) conducted a national study of 1,800 Black college students to explore distinctions between the collegiate experiences between Black undergraduate students attending HWIs and HBCUs. Of the 1,800 participants in this study 872 attended HWIs. Findings from this quantitative study indicated that college racial composition and climate were associated with academic achievement, social involvement, and faculty interactions. Thus, Black students attending HWIs reported lower academic success, campus involvement, and favorable relationships with faculty than those attending HBCUs. Additionally, results from this study suggest that career aspirations, gender identity, and family economic status also influenced educational outcomes of students. Lastly, Allen (1992) concluded that personal traits such as academic readiness, zeal, and intellectual ability would also impact academic achievement, in addition to the state of campus life, academic rigor and competition, academic resources, institutional rules and regulations, racial relations, student-faculty relationships, and the amount of support networks for students.

Like Allen's study, Davis (1994) conducted a study to learn more about the interactions between students' background, college determinants, and college academic achievement and how these aspects impacted Black male collegians differently based on their attendance at HBCUs or HWIs. The study sought to explore the influence of campus climate and social support on academic performance. This study utilized a subset of prior data from a national study yielding 742 Black males, 55% of which attended HWIs. Findings from this study suggested that Black male collegians' academic and

individual background had more of an impact on their academic performance at HBCUs. Furthermore, the racial composition of the institution had a significant impact on academic performance for Black males, although the impact is not as significant for Black males attending HWIs. Davis (1994) posited that overall Black males were impacted differently based on their attendance at HBCUs and HWIs. Additionally, he argued that Black male collegians: 1) attending HWIs exhibited higher academic readiness based on SAT scores, which was still lower than their White male peers, and 2) consistent with Allen (1992), those attending HBCUs received higher grades in college. Davis (1994) suggested, based on the results of this study, that regardless of whether students attended HWIs or HBCUs, high school academic performance and the level of academic integration were constant variables in the educational outcomes of Black male collegians. Davis (1994) argued urgency for institutions, especially HWIs, to develop new approaches for increasing the social and academic success of Black male collegians, which scholars like Derrick Brooms, Michael Cuyjet, T. Elon Dancy, Shaun Harper, Brian Hotchkins, Terrell Strayhorn, and several others have answered.

In an effort to create a counter-narrative to the bleak educational status of Black male collegians offered through deficit literature, Harper (2009b) conducted a qualitative study of 143 participants at 30 HWIs. As argued by Harper (2009b), much of the literature on Black male collegians negatively renders them as incompetent and unsuccessful. Interview data revealed that participants in this study encountered low expectations regarding leadership and achievement among Black males. Consequently, these students developed defiant responses to racial stereotyping and notions of inferiority. Expressly, these students diligently rejected the negative, dominant

depictions often placed on Black males within society and on historically White college campuses. Harper (2009b) affirmed that Black male collegians who are academically successful regardless of the circumstances they face at HWIs, are present on each college campus in the U.S. despite their achievement being obscured by dominant narratives which only highlight dismal educational outcomes of these students.

Strayhorn (2013) conducted a study aimed at examining the influence *grit* has on the academic achievement of Black male undergraduate students at historically White colleges and universities. Grit is “the tendency to pursue long-term challenging goals with perseverance and passion” (Strayhorn, 2013, p. 7). The results from this suggested that grit among Black males is positively associated with grades in college. Furthermore, results from this study indicate that background traits, academic factors, and grit explain 24 % of the variance in Black male’s college grades. As found by Strayhorn (2013), grit increased incremental predictive validity above traditional measures of academic achievement and success (i.e. high school grade point average and standardized test scores). Thus, the results of this study indicate that grit can be an effective factor in expanding academic success among Black male collegians.

Harper (2012) conducted The National Black Male College Achievement Study, which consisted of 219 Black male collegians between 42 institutions in hopes of providing a counter-narrative to notions that Black males are not successful in their pursuit of a college education. The participants in this study had previously exhibited success in a variety of educational milieus. The results of the study supported Harper’s hypothesis that Black males can achieve success in college. Further findings demonstrated that Black male collegians were successful in college based on personal

motivation and drive, in addition to familial, peer, and institutional support of their achievement. Participants in the study were highly involved on their campuses in myriad forms, which was attributable to their college success (Harper, 2012). For instance, several students were engaged in *structured mentor programs*, like BMI programs, which connected them with individuals, resources, and experiences that promoted their college success.

According to several researchers, Black male student or academic success is a product of meaningful and supportive encounters with peers, faculty, and staff on campus (e.g. Barker & Avery, 2012; Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008); in addition to educationally purposeful engagement in campus activities and student organizations (Kuh et al. 2006). Although Black male collegians tend to discover and create their own ways to be successful on college campuses, the task of fostering success among Black male collegians should be assumed by colleges and universities (Harper, 2012). Institutions that embrace their role in promoting black male success and devote themselves to addressing issues that continuously hinder these students are commendable. (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

**Campus Climate.** A great deal of early research on Black males in college focused on gaps in access, academic achievement, degree attainment, and intellectual inferiority (Harper, 2006; Kim & Hargrove, 2013) while suggesting the issues they faced resulted from their own doing or lack thereof (Howard, 2013). Edgert (1994) further argued:

Normally cited as explanations of these differential patterns are factors deemed to be attributable to the student: lack of academic preparation, lack of motivation,

dysfunctional family life, lower level of intelligence, or disadvantages resulting from living in a poor community-to name a few (p. 51).

While individual traits may have a corollary impact on the educational experiences of Black male collegians, there are environmental and structural factors that also influence persistence, academic achievement, and overall college success of Black male collegians. Students experience the climate of a campus upon their arrival and continue to experience it throughout their time in college. Edgert (1994) defines campus climate as the formal and informal setting in which individuals learn, teach, live, and work. Similarly, Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) define campus climate as the institutional environment that has the capability of nurturing academic achievement and degree completion. Campus climate is the composition of interpersonal interactions and relationships that create the experiences of college students (Edgert, 1994).

Campus climate has been found to have an impact on student success and experiences (Edgert, 1994; Fischer, 2007; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). According to Yosso et al. (2009), campus climate can yield lower levels of student success and increased rates of student dropout. Furthermore, a considerable number of scholars have pinpointed campus climate as a direct hindrance to student success for Black students at HWIs (e.g., Allen, 1992; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Solórzano et al., 2000; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). Bypassing campus climate as a contributor to the unfavorable experiences of Black males on college campuses exonerates institutions from any responsibility and role in creating environments in which all students are not given an equitable opportunity to excel and achieve success. Furthermore, this omission also allows institutions to eschew having to

create more intentional, welcoming, and supportive environments for students, particularly Black males. Institutions and the higher education system as a whole play a major role in the educational outcomes of students and how students from various backgrounds navigate college (Brooms, et al., 2015; Harper, 2006, 2012; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010)

Several studies have been conducted to better understand how students experience campus climates based on racial differences (Fischer, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Using a climate assessment instrument, Rankin and Reason (2005) conducted a study of 7,347 students from 10 different college campuses. Based on their findings, it was indicated that students of color experienced racially offensive and hostile environments at rates much higher than White students. For the students of color, the negative racial campus climate impeded on their learning. In the same manner, Fischer (2007) conducted a study to explore differences in the transition to college and the results various adjustment strategies had on college outcomes based on race and ethnicity. Fischer (2007) found that students of color, specifically Black students, exhibited the highest average perceptions of a negative campus racial environment, which was consistent with Rankin & Reason (2005). Based on findings from these studies, Black students tend to perceive their campus environment negatively over any other group of students (Allen, 1992, Davis, 1994, Fischer, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). This could be explained by the racism, stereotypes, and microaggressions faced by Black students at historically White campuses (Smith et al. 2007, 2011).

**Racial Microaggressions.** When examining race and racism, it is important to consider the subtle, gross, clear, mini-assaults against people of color (Pierce, 1974) –

commonly known today as microaggressions. Solórzano et al. (2000) defined microaggressions as unconscious, covert slights directed at people of color, which can be verbal, nonverbal, and/or visible. Pierce (1995) argued that microaggressions can appear to be innocuous but have a cumulative, lasting impact which lead to harmful burdens for individuals of color. Microaggressions are also abrupt, daily, prevalent acts which convey hostility (Sue, et al, 2007). According to Smith et al. (2011), Black males face microaggressions and barriers to success in predominantly White spaces, such as HWIs. Solórzano and colleagues (2000) conducted a study to explore how racial microaggressions impact the racial climate on college campuses. They found that racial micro-aggressions occurred in both academic and social spaces on college campuses, and therefore, have a negative influence on the campus racial climate.

In a study, Sue et al. (2007) found that microaggressions appear in three ways: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are straightforward, purposefully violent, racial verbal or nonverbal attacks intended to hurt victims through name-calling, avoidant acts, or discriminatory actions. Microinsults can be rude, callous comments which aim to humiliate an individual's racial identity or background. Microinvalidations are exclusionary remarks or behaviors which quash or nullify experiential reality, thoughts, and feelings of people of color. According to Sue et al. (2008) microaggressions can be experienced in institutions, yield enormous psychological agony, and create disparities in education for people of color.

**Racial Battle Fatigue.** According to Pierce (1995), Black people deal with constant oppressive forces including environments or incidents which impede their time, space, and energy; all of which can be calculated into developing coping strategies to

deal with racism. Likewise, Black students and other students of color experience this continual oppression and discrimination in their collegiate experiences at HWIs (Allen, 1992; Smith, et al., 2007). As reported by Smith, et al. (2011), Black males face racialized contradictions in pursuit of a college degree at HWIs as they encounter campus climates saturated with gendered racism. This gendered racism results in extreme physiological and psychological stress, known as racial battle fatigue (RBF; Smith 2004; Smith et al., 2007, 2011). RBF manifests in emotions and feelings such as frustration, cognitive dissonance, anger, disappointment, resentment, helplessness, hopelessness, and fear which can result in headaches and even worse chronic health conditions.

In Smith et al.'s (2007) study, 36 Black males were interviewed to explore how racial microaggressions in White environments can produce psychological conditions of RBF. This study primarily focused on the social and academic experiences of Black males at elite HWIs. Participants in this study reported experiencing racial microaggressions in three environments—academic, social, and common spaces. Two themes emerged from the results of the study: 1) anti-Black male labeling and marginalization which led to 2) hyper-surveillance and policing. In other words, Black males were wrongfully labeled as being out of place and fitting the description of impostors to the campus environment. Every participant in this study reported that they felt the campus climate was more unfavorable toward Black males than any other group. Additionally, Smith and colleagues' (2011) quantitative study examined the collegiate experiences of 661 Black males to better understand the impact of racial microaggressions and societal issues on mundane, extreme, environmental stress (MEES) as students progress toward graduation. Using a structural equation model, this study

indicated that as Black males persist toward college graduation, both racial microaggressions and societal problems contribute to more than one third of the cause of MEES. Results from this study indicate that predominantly White environments foster racial battle fatigue among Black males. As Black males face microaggressions and racial battle fatigue, these experiences have the potential to influence decisions to persist or drop out of college. Sadly, for most Black males and individuals of color, these unfavorable feelings and experiences with race rarely fade and have a lasting impact on their lives (Smith, et al., 2007). In order to foster campus climates that support achievement of Black males, colleges and universities must turn their attention to creating multifaceted, supportive pathways to success (Bonner & Bailey, 2006), as well as actively working to change campus climate and institutional culture (Brooms et al., 2015)

### **Black Male Student Involvement**

Researchers have identified student involvement as a contributor to Black male college retention and success (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Sutton & Terrell, 1997; Strayhorn, 2008). Additionally, it is well-documented that Black males serve as leaders, activists, and social change agents on college campuses (Allen, 1992; Dancy & Hotchkins, 2015; Fleming, 1984; Harper, 2013; Palmer, Wood, Dancy & Strayhorn, 2013). Involvement and participation in student organizations allows Black males to gain and develop leadership skills, which can result in greater social integration within campus environments and ultimately, increased persistence (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008).

**Cultural & Fraternal Involvement.** Black male collegians have a long history of being active in and assuming leadership roles in student organizations at HWIs (Cuyjet, 2006; Fleming, 1984; Hotchkins, 2014); many of which have been in historically Black fraternities and cultural student organizations (see Guiffrida, 2003; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; McClure, 2006; Sutton & Terrell, 1997). In fact, during the early 1900s, Black male collegians began creating student organizations and fraternities in efforts to support, increase persistence, and foster camaraderie among one another in the face of racial discrimination at HWIs. For instance, the first Black, collegiate fraternity--Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. was established at Cornell University, an HWI, in 1906. In addition, more historically Black organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Black student unions, gospel choirs, and national Black career oriented organizations were established and served as outlets for engagement among Black students.

Collectively, these organizations were established with the purpose to provide academic and social support, leadership, racial identity development, and cultural heritage within the Black community (DeSousa and King, 1992; Sutton & Terrell, 1997). In many cases, these cultural organizations shielded Black male collegians from racial discrimination, tension, stress, pressure to assimilate, and other negative effects of racism (Guiffrida, 2003; Hotchkins, 2014; Sutton & Terrell, 1997). These student organizations tend to serve as cultural enclaves that cultivate Black male academic and social advancement as well as provide strategies for navigating HWIs (Flowers, 2004; Guiffrida, 2003; Sutton & Terrell, 1997). Dancy (2012) argued that Black males engage in cultural organizations to fulfill devotions to their racial communities.

**Campus-Wide Involvement.** During the 1960s, participation of Black males in predominantly White, campus-wide activities and organizations increased as colleges and universities sought to desegregate their campuses and student activities (DeSousa & King, 1992). Similarly, Harper and Quaye (2007) found that Black male membership and engagement within White, campus-based organizations had increased although these organizations have traditionally encouraged assimilation into dominant culture, embodied racial hostility, and quenched Black cultural identity. Indeed, some Black male collegians are inclined to purposely engage in predominantly White organizations as an opportunity to positively demonstrate being Black and male while refuting negatives stereotypes (Komives, Owen & Longerbeam, 2005) that intersect at maleness and Blackness (Dancy & Hotchkins, 2015). In their investigation of leadership involvement among Black men in college, Sutton and Terrell (1997) posited that while there are leadership opportunities in both White campus-wide and cultural organizations alike, Black fraternities tend to provide the most opportunities for Black males to engage in leadership at HWIs. Similarly, McClure (2006) found that Black fraternities help create supportive campus environments for members conducive to increasing success and satisfaction in college, as well as increased possibilities for success after college. In a multi-institutional qualitative study of how Black males engaged in Black fraternities construct manhood, Dancy and Hotchkins (2015) found that fraternity engagement promotes persistence and leadership while broadening the worldviews of their members.

Regardless of the mode of engagement, Davis (1994) argued that social support through involvement enhances academic success and persistence among Black males. Additionally, Bentley-Edwards and Chapman-Hilliard (2015) theorized that racial

cohesion (e.g., racial identity, behaviors, relationships, and interests) can be used as a source of resilience, positive racial considerations, achievement, and social responsibility in college. In particular, they noted that racial cohesion building strategies have implications for Black college students' success in education initiatives and student affairs programming and, additionally, they can help "promote a healthy racial climate by validating the importance of Black social issues" (p. 53). Similar to the positive benefits of participating in fraternities and student organizations, as well as racial cohesion, BMI programs also provide a means of academic and social integration for Black male collegians and opportunities for bonding.

**Black Male Initiatives.** Attempts to improve the overall academic success and overall collegiate experiences of Black males have gained attention (Brooks et al., 2013; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012) and increased tremendously over the past 15 years (Brooms, 2016). Programs and initiatives tailored specifically for Black males are a vital part of enhancing the educational experiences of these students (Ellis, 2009; St. Léger, 2012). BMIs are one example of efforts aimed at boosting retention and graduation rates among Black male undergraduate college students. According to Brooms (2016), these programs are organized to promote social and academic integration of Black male collegians into campus communities. BMI programs enable students to recognize and understand the obstacles to Black male success and actively strive to conquer those obstacles (Anthony, Skerritt & Goodman, 2012). Additionally, Somers (2000) suggested that retention programs should promote college interest and contentment, degree aspiration, and positive social encounters.

Some of the earliest BMI-type programs on college campuses stemmed from student organizations or chapters of national associations developed to support Black males throughout their college experience. Two examples include Brother-to-Brother (B2B) and Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB). Although these programs have impacted thousands of Black and Latino males with several chapters on campuses throughout the country (Brooms, 2016), Barker and Avery (2012) advocated for institutionally-supported Black male-centered initiatives. These institutionally-supported initiatives have the resources to provide Black male collegians, especially those who attend HWIs, with student services tailored to address the specific needs of these students. Moreover, institutionally-supported BMIs offer opportunities for theory development, research, and practice, allowing institutions to create similar experiences for Black males across the nation (Barker & Avery, 2012; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). As Harper and Kuykendall (2012) addressed the newness and trendiness of BMI programs, Barker and Avery (2012) highlighted the limited amount of research exploring institutionally supported BMI programs. Currently, three studies have examined institutionally supported BMI programs (see Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms et al., 2015; St. Léger, 2012); therefore, more research on institutionally created and supported retention initiatives is needed (Ellis, 2009).

BMI programs are normally structured with staff or faculty devoted to sustaining the mission and goal of the initiative while providing leadership, mentorship, and support to program participants. It is common for BMI programs to also incorporate peer mentors and cohort models to engage Black male collegians and foster their success. BMI programs can receive financial support from funds set aside to increase campus

diversity or college graduation rates. Harper and Kuykendall (2012) argued that these initiatives are overwhelmingly supported by university divisions or departments such as multicultural affairs or Black cultural centers with little to no support from White faculty, staff, and administrators. Thus, these programs often lack substantial, long-term institutional support; leaving these programs susceptible to instability and questions of relevance in the face of budget cuts and color-blind racism. Despite questions that may arise surrounding their relevance, BMI programs serve as an important means to engage Black male collegians (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2016; Brooms et al., 2015; Zell, 2011). Campus engagement has been found to positively influence Black male academic achievement (e.g. Davis, 1994; Hotchkins, 2014; Strayhorn, 2008)

Involvement in BMIs is often based on attendance in program meetings, lectures, discussion-based workshops, retreats, and community service. Professional staff over BMI programs may define and implement certain criteria for student participation and continuation in the programs, which could include minimum GPA and attendance requirements. Within these programs Black males are connected to institutional resources aimed at actively engaging participants throughout their time in college; connecting Black males with campus resources allows them to better navigate their college experience, while developing their educational and career aspirations post-graduation (Anthony, et al., 2012). Also, participants are occasionally provided with group travel opportunities to attend leadership and professional development conferences, as well as visit historical and culturally relevant sites. Through BMI programs, students are often given the space to engage in critical and culturally affirming dialogue on topics such as education, leadership, race, class, masculinity, spirituality, politics, and the

current state of Black men in the U.S. In addition, BMI programs have been found to provide a means for Black male collegians to: (1) find support and build social skills (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2016); (2) develop their identity (Anthony et al., 2012); (3) gain the non-cognitive skills and agency to cope with racism and other barriers to success (Brooms, et al., 2015; Zell, 2011); and (4) gain transferable skills important for their post-graduation careers (Anthony et al., 2012; Harper & Kuykendall. 2012).

In Barker and Avery's (2012) qualitative study it was discovered that a BMI influenced the academic and social integration of Black males. This study was based on focus group interviews to investigate (1) how the program influenced the persistence of Black male students during and beyond the first year and (2) the unique experiences between first-year and second-year students participating in the program. Findings from this study indicate that the BMI program allowed students to foster positive connections with peers and better understand the intersection of race and gender in the context of attending a HWI. Participants in Barker and Avery's study described how the BMI program proactively prepared them for incidents they would encounter by being both Black and male in a predominantly White campus. Likewise, Brooms' (2016) study of 40 Black male collegians participating in BMI programs at two universities examined the involvement and experiences of the students in the programs. Based on the meanings students made of their engagement within the program, the findings indicated that BMIs are an essential avenue for supporting Black male collegians while building their social and cultural capital (Brooms, 2016); this finding is consistent with previous research (Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms et al., 2015; Zell, 2011) on programs aimed at retaining Black male collegians. Participants in Brooms' study witnessed increases in their social

and cultural capital through community building with their peers in the BMI program. Participants in both studies attributed their ability to succeed in college to the supportive, nurturing, and encouraging nature of BMI programs similar to their home environments (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2016).

In a mixed-methods study, Brooks and colleagues (2013) probed a retention program for freshmen Black male collegians at a large university. The study sought to better understand the impact of retention programs on first-year, Black male students. Results from the study indicated that the first-year retention program increased grade point averages for students as they progressed through the program. Similar to research findings on BMI programs, general retention programs have been found to have a positive impact on Black male academic achievement (Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms, 2016). Thus, retention programs and initiatives provide various forms of support, opportunities to build positive peer connections, and chances to engage with faculty and staff on campus (Brooms et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2014). Although research is lacking, current studies (e.g. Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2016; Zell, 2011) demonstrate how these initiatives improve the collegiate experiences of Black male undergraduate students attending HWIs. Participants in BMIs find themselves engaged on campus while being privy to relationships, opportunities, and resources they may not otherwise experience (Barker & Avery, 2012), all of which increase sense of belonging among Black male collegians.

### **Conceptual Framework**

*Sense of belonging* is a conceptual framework based on the psychological experiences of college students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of

belonging refers to “an individual’s sense of identification or positioning in relation to a group or to the college community” (Tovar & Simon, 2010, p. 200). Several scholars argue that sense of belonging is a basic human need as defined by Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs. Strayhorn (2012) framed the notion of sense of belonging as a basic human need which becomes of heightened salience in specific social environments where individuals might be made to feel unwelcomed, isolated, alienated, or invisible. Therefore, sense of belonging is essential to students’ sense of value and self, which in turn can impact their success in college as well as their decisions to persist or not. Therefore, several models of student persistence intrinsically include elements of sense of belonging (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007).

Previously, Strayhorn (2008) argued that receiving social support on campus led students to feel connected and that they mattered to others. Strayhorn connected sense of belonging to Astin’s (1999) Student Involvement Theory, attributing students’ feelings of academic and social integration to their sense of community and belonging. Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone (2002, 2003) argued that sense of community is achieved through positive peer interactions, student-faculty interactions, and campus climate. According to Strayhorn (2012), providing support, promoting campus involvement, and offering academic support services can increase sense of belonging, particularly for Black male collegians. This finding alone is the impetus for employing sense of belonging as a conceptual framework for the current study.

The framework of sense of belonging provides many theoretical and practical implications to enhancing the collegiate experiences of Black men. As higher education aims to enhance the academic achievement, retention, and graduation of students, sense

of belonging is both relevant and essential. Sense of belonging can guide approaches faculty take in their interactions with students, as well as how student services are tailored to fit the needs of specific marginalized student populations. Meeting and even exceeding the basic needs of students can increase their sense of value and self. Additionally, Museus (2014) argued that students exhibit more positive academic postures and greater levels of academic achievement which allows them to persist toward graduation with increased levels of sense of belonging. Perceptions of belonging and mattering serve a greater need for Black male collegians in historically and predominantly White campuses that tend to be unwelcoming and un-supportive of these students and their potential. Creating intentional, male-centric micro-communities and spaces, such as BMIs, can minimize feelings of being unwelcomed, isolated, alienated, or invisible. Understanding the role sense of belonging plays in the Black male collegiate experience underscores current and future Black male matriculation, persistence, and academic success. Therefore, sense of belonging is essential to the current study as I seek to understand the ways in which BMI programs impact the experiences of Black men in college.

### **Summary**

As illustrated by this literature review, research pertaining to Black male collegians is vast. Harper (2014) argued that while many have sought to raise awareness and ultimately improve the collegiate experiences of Black males, comparable outcomes have not been witnessed yet. In fact, researchers presume that while universities have sincerely endeavored to improve outcomes for this group, their efforts have been antiquated and unrealistic (Harper, 2014; Palmer et al., 2013); which can be attributed to

anti-deficit perspectives and culturally devoid approaches that aim to amend Black males rather than listening to their voices. These factors are exacerbated at HWIs, which are known to be unwelcoming to Black males and not conducive to their success (Smith et al., 2007; St. Léger, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008). According to Harper (2014), these historically detrimental perspectives and environments, in addition to other things, have obstructed institutions' mission to operationalize successful plans for Black male success.

Despite minimal progress, researchers contend that institutions must become intentionally supportive spaces for Black male collegians (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008). Student engagement has been identified as one of the means to supporting college students and fostering their success. Likewise, researchers have found that student engagement boosts college retention and success among Black male collegians (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Sutton & Terrell, 1997; Strayhorn, 2008). Retention programs, such as BMIs, provide another mode of student engagement, while helping to create inclusive college environments for Black males. Additionally, these programs offer opportunities for students to reach their academic goals and gain transferable skills that help them navigate higher education and life thereafter (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2016; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). As St. Léger (2012) maintained, there is not a singular or correct formula to remedying college retention issues and ensuring Black male success. Nevertheless, Druery and Brooms (forthcoming) found that BMI programs provide culturally enriching college environments for Black male collegians, where they experience brotherhood, support, and development. As additional research is conducted to explore BMI programs, the potential benefits of these programs are limitless.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the details of and rationale for the research design chosen for this study. Information pertaining to the research approach and method, data collection, research sample, and data analysis processes employed in the study are addressed in this chapter. The current study was a qualitative, multi-case study that relied on multiple data sources to address the research question of how and in what ways do BMIs impact college student experiences at three HWIs. Also, in this chapter I detail each source of data, the purpose for using multiple data sources, and the rationale for each. Next, the sampling strategies used in this study to select the sites and participants that build each case will be explained. The process of data analysis is also explained to convey how the data was treated and presented. The chapter concludes with various factors, particularly researcher positionality and ethical considerations, related to how the findings are drawn from the data.

#### **Research Approach**

The field of education lends itself to many possibilities for research (Merriam, 1998). In educational research, the process of how research is conducted is potentially just as salient as what is revealed in the study (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2015; Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, the approach researchers take in conducting research, particularly in education, becomes critical to the outcome of the study. As researchers seek to enhance the landscape of education and as a result, researchable questions develop, Merriam (1998) argued that qualitative research can be one of the best approaches. Based on the purpose of this study, which is to explore the ways in which BMI programs impact the

educational experiences of Black male collegians at HWIs, a qualitative approach is befitting (see Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014).

Qualitative research is a descriptive type of inquiry which concentrates on qualities and interpretations that are challenging, and perhaps, too complex to quantify (Glesne, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Graue and Karabon (2013), qualitative research entails efforts to describe scientifically; to understand both inductively and deductively; and to challenge, by closely examining phenomena. As of late, qualitative studies have been situated within political, social, and cultural contexts (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research usually relies on smaller participant samples, located in their natural environment to generate rich, in-depth descriptions of the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Within qualitative research, there are various methods that are relevant and overlap when conducting a study. These different forms and methods of qualitative inquiry aid in explaining and understanding social phenomena. Unlike quantitative research, which breaks a phenomenon into smaller components or variables to be examined, qualitative research explores how all the components of a phenomenon work together in tandem (Merriam, 1998). This form of research is concerned with making sense of and interpreting phenomena based on the meanings people bring to them (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 1998). Thus, qualitative inquiry embodies the unique trait of being people-centric and connecting people to the social world surrounding them (Miles et al., 2014). Creswell (2013) passionately argued:

We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study. We conduct qualitative research because we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue (p. 48).

Creswell's argument is a salient motivator for the current study as it seeks to have the often delegitimized voices of Black men come alive in understanding how they encounter college and BMI programs intended to improve their success in college.

### **Research Method**

The case study method is a qualitative approach which examines and illustrates a real-life case through meticulous data collection (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014) and is common in educational research (Merriam, 1998). The case study approach begins with selecting a unique case to be studied (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). "A hallmark of a good case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case" (Creswell, 2013, p. 98). This in-depth understanding is achieved by collecting multiple forms of data, including interviews and document analysis (Creswell 2013; Glesne, 2015; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). While Glesne (2015) argued that what is included in a "case" may differ, case study scholars agree that each case is a "bounded" unified structure with several parts (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2015; Stake, 1995). The essence of a case study is that it attempts to highlight a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and what the result is (Schramm, 1971 as cited in Yin, 2014)

Merriam (1998) advocated for using case studies as an appropriate approach to conduct research in the field of education. Furthermore, Yin (2014) advised using the case study method rather than surveys, experiments, and statistical analyses when “how” or “why” research questions are developed to address modern behaviors and events that researchers cannot manipulate. “...although case studies and histories can overlap, the case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations...” (Yin, 2014, p. 12). From a programmatic perspective, Yin (2014) suggested the comparative advantage of case studies is that rather than investigating whether programs work, they can explore how programs work.

The case study method can be defined by its unique features and characterizations (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) noted that case studies can be particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. This study is particularistic based on its focus on a particular type of program, in this case BMI programs at HWIs. This study is descriptive in nature by using “rich, thick” descriptions (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995) that include quotations from focus groups and material from program documents (Merriam, 1998). In addition, the study is heuristic in nature as it expands the understanding of BMI programs, which is the phenomena being studied (Merriam, 1998).

There are three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Trainor & Graue, 2013). The collective case study, also known as multi-case study, is a form of the case study method where one phenomena is illustrated utilizing multiple cases and sites. Researchers often rely on multi-case study to explore and compare various perspectives on an issue (Creswell, 2013) and gain a

deeper knowledge of the processes and results of cases (Miles et al., 2014). The multi-case design has unique advantages in comparison to single-case design (Yin, 2014). For example, Herriott and Firestone (1983) argued that results from multi-case design are more compelling and overall, multi-case studies are more robust than single-case studies. With all of this in mind, a multi-case study design was employed for this research project.

### **Philosophical Orientations**

Qualitative research finds its underpinnings in philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks, which allow us to understand the nature of research and how knowledge is developed (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Glesne, 2015; Trainor & Graue, 2013). A key consideration in approaching qualitative inquiry is the researcher's philosophical belief about the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and the creation of knowledge (axiology; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 1998). Yin (2014) argued that the all-encompassing nature of the case study method allows for embracing multiple orientations and assumptions. The current study addressed the ontological question of reality by presenting multiple realities of each case based on programmatic differences and participant narratives. The subjective experiences of these students will provide evidence within the results of the study (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). From an epistemological standpoint, the researcher attempted to get as close to and familiar with Black male collegians participating in selected BMI programs (see Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I addressed the axiological assumption by positioning myself, my values, and my beliefs in this study, which I outline in the Researcher Positionality section to follow later in this chapter. As previously stated in Chapter One, this study was approached through a

critical theory lens, particularly relying on CRT, to address the ways in which gendered racism has positioned Black male collegians in society and on college campuses.

### **Data Collection**

This study relied on multiple sources of data as suggested for the case study approach to conducting qualitative research (see Creswell, 2013, Glesne, 2015; Yin, 2014). These data were gathered from students engaged in BMI programs. Data collection consisted of interview data and document analysis at each institution. These data yielded full, in-depth descriptions for the selected cases (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2015; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995, 2006). The data collection process began with requesting documentation from each program consisting of memoranda, meeting notes, mission statements, and structural outlines. This information was requested as a preliminary data source to better understand each BMI program more specifically. These documents revealed (a) institutional actors and stakeholders associated with each program, (b) the history of the program, (c) the mission and purpose of each program, (d) the structure and institutional support of the programs, and (e) program features that engage students. Next, focus group interviews were conducted at each institution to glean student experiences in the three BMIs and how each program impacts sense of belonging for students. Students provided demographic information using the Student Demographic Questionnaire in Appendix C, which will be used to help profile the participants of this study.

**Focus Groups.** According to scholars, interviews are one of the most important sources of case study evidence (Stake, 1995, 2006; Yin, 2014). Interviews can be either conducted individually or in a group setting. Focus group interviews involve facilitating

a dialogue on a specific topic among a select group of individuals. This form of data collection has become popular in recent years (Glesne, 2015; Krueger & Casey, 2000). Glesne (2015) stated that focus group interviews can be an efficient use of time and resources based on simultaneous access to a number of perspectives from individuals on a topic. According to Morgan and Krueger (1993), focus groups interviews are advantageous when conducting research with populations who have historically been oppressed, particularly people of color. Another advantage of focus groups is that they occur in natural environments to create a comfortable, permissive environment for participants (Frey & Fontana, 1993; Glesne, 2015; Krueger & Casey, 2000). Focus groups provide a powerful insight into the perceptions of individuals toward an issue or service (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan & Kreuger, 1993); in this case students and their perception of BMI programs. Focus groups allow us to improve new and existing programs and evaluate outcomes (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

For focus group interviews, scholars recommend targeting students within homogeneous groups who have similar traits and experiences (see Frey & Fontana, 1993; Knodel, 1993). As argued by Glesne (2015), gender and racially homogeneous groups tend to promote an organic, free-flowing discussion that allows for development of critical concepts. Frey and Fontana (1993) advocated for free-flowing dialogue that gives space for opinions to bounce back and forth and be validated by group participants, rather than opinions being singular and participant-specific. Krueger and Casey (2000) recommended aiming for focus group sizes to consist of six to eight individuals, while Frey and Fontana (1993) recommended a size of eight to ten individuals. Based on these recommendations, this study aimed for six to ten participants in each of the three focus

group interviews to allow everyone to express their viewpoint, while ensuring diversity of perception (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Open-ended questions were used to guide each of the three focus group interviews (Frey & Fontana, 1993).

**Document Review.** According to Yin (2014), collecting document information is appropriate for case study research regardless of the topic and should be the target of purposeful data collection plans. Documents used for data collection range from proposals and reports to emails and minutes of meetings. Miles et al. (2014) advocated for interpreting documentation and described it as a holistic method. In case study inquiry, the most impactful use of documents is to support and corroborate other sources of evidence collected (Yin, 2014). The strengths for gathering documents in research are that they: 1) provide stability based on the opportunity for repeated review; 2) offer an unobtrusive perspective since they are not a product of the case study; 3) are specific and contain exact contextual details; and 4) can be broad encompassing longer periods of time, events, and settings. Documents and systematic document searches play a significant role in data collection in any case study due to their comprehensive nature (Yin, 2014). Therefore, this study relied on document collection to affirm, expand, or address gaps in focus group data.

Table 1. Steps of Data Collection

<i>Research Process</i>	<i>Steps</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Standard</i>
<b>Data Collection</b> <b>(2 rounds; 1 per site)</b>	Gather Program Documents	To corroborate & strengthen evidence from other sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant to any case study</li> <li>• Provides stable, specific &amp; detailed information</li> <li>• Unobtrusive &amp; broad</li> </ul>
	Conduct Focus Group Interviews	To offer insight into perceptions of individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the most important sources of case study</li> </ul>

**Validity and Reliability.** According to Yin (2014), there are four common tests used to ensure quality in social science research, which consist of construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2014). Internal validity is not applied to or relevant for descriptive or exploratory studies, so only construct validity, external validity, and reliability were addressed in this study. Construct validity refers to appropriate identification of methods to examine the phenomena being studied. In case study research, construct validity is achieved by collecting multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having key informants review the draft case study report (Yin, 2014). External validity for case studies involves determining the scope to which a study can be replicated. Replication for case studies does not involve arriving at the same results as it does in statistical approaches to research; instead, external validity is achieved through replication logic, which refers to following the same steps to analyzing each case (Yin, 2014). External validity and reliability for case studies are closely related based on their adherence to following research protocol. Merriam (1998) noted that external validity is enhanced when multiple cases are included. Reliability is defined as the consistency and repeatability of research procedure. In case study research, reliability is achieved through documenting and following protocol, especially when multiple cases are involved. According to Yin (2014), the emphasis is on following the same steps of case, rather than “replicating” the results of one case with another case study. In this study, validity was achieved by the multiple forms of data collected and member checking to ensure accuracy of each case. Additionally, reliability was met by following a consistent protocol in the treatment and presentation of each case.

### **Research Sample**

Considering most research scenarios are too expansive for researchers to interview every individual or to observe everything related to a topic, there must be a justifiable selection strategy in place (Glesne, 2015). The selection strategy in qualitative inquiry involves making decisions about the population and individuals to study, in addition to the potential settings, events, and social aspects to study (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2015; Miles et al., 2014). An overwhelming majority of qualitative samples are selected purposefully instead of randomly (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2015; Miles et al., 2014). Purposeful sampling is the initial sampling method used by researchers to select sites and individuals who can provide an understanding of the research problem and primary phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Three decisions are associated with purposeful sampling: whom to select as sites and participants for the study; the type of sampling strategy; and the sample size (Creswell, 2013). Multi-case studies require definite choices about the sample and types of cases to include (Yin, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). As equally important when making sampling decisions is identifying a key individual, often referred to as a *gatekeeper*, who is the first point of contact, allows access to a research site, and assists with coordination of the data collection process (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2015). This section details the research sample based on the three considerations provided by Creswell.

**Sampling Strategies.** The current study employed two sampling techniques to select the three sites, as well as participants for the focus group interviews. According to scholars, some studies may demand more than one sampling technique based on the extent of the study (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2015; Miles et al., 2014). Creswell (2013) suggested selecting unusual cases or sites in multi-case studies and utilizing maximum

variation as a sampling strategy to capture diverse cases and points of view. The maximum variation strategy involved finding outlier cases to examine whether patterns remain constant across cases (Miles et al., 2014). To find outlier cases, the maximum variation sampling technique includes pre-determining criteria to distinguish sites and then selecting sites that are comparatively different (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2015). Merriam (1998) and Yin (2014) have also advocated for pre-selecting sites based on specific criteria. Thus, at the onset of this study, programs were pre-selected based on direct access of the researcher through gatekeepers (Program Advisors and Coordinators), diversity in programs, program longevity, program structure, and availability of document information. Within each case and site, students were identified based on their participation in the selected BMI programs; therefore, *homogeneous sampling* was employed. In homogeneous sampling, the goal is to focus on individuals with similar demographic and social experiences (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014), which allows researchers to describe subgroups in depth. Homogeneous groups in terms of gender and race can yield data that allows for development of critical concepts (Glesne, 2015; Knodel, 1993). Inner group differences can be present within homogeneous groups based on unique characteristics (Knodel, 1993), and as researchers have argued, Black males are not a monolith and embody differing inner group traits (Howard, 2013; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; McGowan, 2016; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010; Smith et al., 2007),

**Selection of Sites.** Selection of research sites is essential when employing the case study method, especially for multi-case studies. For this study, the sites were selected based on the research problem and questions (Glesne, 2015; Stake, 1995, 2006; Yin, 2014). This study was guided by a research problem and question that focus on

BMI programs specifically at HWIs, so therefore, only BMI programs within 4-year HWIs were selected for the study. The HWI categorization included 4-year colleges and universities that only admitted White students ranging from their inception until laws were created and passed to allow admittance and enrollment of Black and other racially minoritized groups of students.

While Stake (2006) suggested that the strength of a multi-case study may be limited if fewer than four cases are chosen, he also argued that for good reason many multi-case studies consist of less than four cases. From another perspective, Creswell (2013) cautioned against using more than four or five cases in one study. Thus, for the purposes of this study, three BMI programs will be selected as cases for analysis.

Selecting three cases will allow for a cross-case analysis that uncovers similarities and differences among the BMI programs (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Each case explored the ways in which BMI programs at HWIs influence the experiences of and foster sense of belonging among their Black male undergraduate participants.

**Site Demographics.** Based on the selection criteria, the three cases selected for this multi-case study included: St. Matthew University (pseudonym), Hudson University (pseudonym), and Gaines University (pseudonym). Each university fell within the 4-year HWI category and each support a BMI program to increase retention among Black male collegians.

*St. Matthew University (SMU)* St. Matthew University (SMU) is a large, public, land-grant university located in the southern region of the U.S. The university holds a Carnegie Classification (2015) of highest research activity. Founded in the late 1800s, the university has grown to have a current total undergraduate student enrollment of

48,500. The Black student population constitutes approximately 4% of the total student population, and the Black male population is 45.5% compared to the Black female population of 54.5%. The university has over 130 undergraduate degree programs and more than 1,100 student organizations. The university has placed the value of diversity at its core and embarked on a diversity plan designed to enhance accountability, climate, and equity. Of the many initiatives in this diversity plan, a BMI program, known as the Black Male Network (BMN) was created to increase engagement, retention, and graduation among the university's Black male undergraduate population.

*Hudson University* (HU) is a medium-sized, public, state university located in the southern region of the U.S. that was established in the late 1700s. According to the Carnegie Classification (2015), HU is categorized with the highest research activity. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the university reported an undergraduate student enrollment of approximately 16,000 (program website). The Black student population constituted approximately 11% of the total student population (NCES, 2017), and the Black male population was 49% compared to the Black female population of 51% of the total Black student population (program website). The university has over 60 undergraduate degree programs and more than 400 student organizations. HU's BMI program, the Black Male League (BML), was implemented to meet the distinct needs of Black males and ultimately enhance the educational experiences and graduation rates of these students.

*Gaines University* (GU) is a mid-sized, public, land-grant university located in the Midwestern region of the U.S. The Carnegie Classification (2015) categorizes GU as having the highest research activity. The university was established in the mid-1800s.

The university has over 300 undergraduate degree programs and more than 600 student organizations. With a current total undergraduate student enrollment of 26,000, Black or African-American students make up only eight percent of the student population (NCES, 2017). In 2016, the six-year graduation rate for Black or African-American students was 57%, which was one of the lowest among other racial and ethnic groups (NCES, 2017). GU created the Black Male Connection (BMC) program to assist in the successful transition of Black males into the collegiate environment.

**Selection of Students.** Another part of planning for research is determining the individuals to include in a study. This decision should be based on the characteristics of individuals being targeted for the study (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Knodel, 1993).

Typically, participants are selected because they have certain common experiences that connect to the topic being researched (Kreuger & Casey, 2000; Knodel, 1993). For the purposes of this study, focus group participants were selected who fit the following criteria: (a) participants with moderate (i.e. attendance at 50% of program events) to high engagement (i.e. attendance at 75% of program events) with the BMI program at their respective institution; (b) identify as Black; (c) currently enrolled as a full-time student in the institution; (d) classified as a sophomore, junior, or senior; and (e) At least 18 years of age. These criteria were shared with the BMI program staff at each university, and I relied on the program staff to identify and solicit student to volunteer participate in the study. Prior to each site visit, I obtained a list of students interested in participating in each focus group interview. As previously stated, I aimed for each focus group to consist of five to eight students.

## **Data Analysis**

According to Stake (1995), qualitative studies are supported through researchers making sense of data, so this section outlines the steps I took to make sense of the data. Once data collection was completed, the data were organized and analyzed to find patterns and themes. Analysis of the data was based on video recordings of focus group interviews and documents provided from each BMI program. Data analysis was conducted in three phases: 1) preparing and arranging the data for analysis; 2) coding the data into themes; and 3) presenting the data through figures and discussion in a meaningful manner (see Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). All of the focus group interview video recordings were transcribed into text using Rev, a professional transcription service. As the focus interview transcriptions were received, I reviewed each one for accuracy; this was done by listening to the video recordings and correcting any errors made by the transcription service.

The second phase of data analysis included organizing the data into themes. “Coding is...a data condensation task that enables you to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 73). Further, Saldaña, 2016 argued that codes are labels of words or short phrases that symbolically attach summative qualities or reminiscent attributes to a portion or chunk of data. For this study, data coding occurred in two cycles: (1) applying initial codes to the data using process coding, which uses “-ing” words to denote action in the data; and (2) transforming codes into themes using focused coding, which groups coded data based on thematic commonalities (Saldaña, 2016). Themes within the data emerged through an iterative, constant comparative process (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998) that involved deep reflection and

analysis (Miles et al., 2013). Both the focus group interview data and document analysis yielded rich, weighted descriptions of each case and their setting (Yin, 2014).

The last phase of data analysis included data presenting the data in discussions and figures. This was done in two ways: a) presenting data in three single cases using within-case analysis and b) presenting all three cases using cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2013; Stake, 2006). Table 2 outlines each step in the process of data analysis, as well as the methods taken for each step.

Table 2. Steps of Data Analysis

<i>Research Process</i>	<i>Phases</i>	<i>Steps</i>	<i>Method</i>
<b>Data Analysis</b>	Organizing the Data	Transcribe all data electronically	Transcribed by professional transcription service, Rev.com, immediately after collection
		Data reviewed for accuracy	Member checking
	Coding Data into Themes	Read & memo data	Process Coding
		Organize data into codes	Pattern Coding
		Code data into themes	Focused Coding
	Present the Data	Compile single case reports	Within Case Analysis
Compile multi-case report		Cross-Case Analysis	

The discussion of data will be analyzed and presented through the conceptual framework chosen for this study, sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). This will demonstrate how and in what ways participation in BMI programs fosters sense of belonging for Black male collegians attending HWIs. In the four subsequent chapters to follow, I meaningfully present the findings from the data collected and analyzed for this study.

**Researcher Positionality.** Denzin and Lincoln (2011) further characterized qualitative research as a situated activity which positions researchers within the world

and consists of substantial methods that allows the world to become visible. Therefore, qualitative research relies on the presence and proximity of the researcher for interpretation of the data (Merriam, 1998; Milner, 2007). As researchers position themselves in the data analysis process, the researcher's background and personal experiences become the lens through which data is interpreted (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Milner, 2007). Milner (2007) advocates for *researcher positionality*, which is a process of racial and cultural awareness, consciousness, and situated relationships for researchers to consider when approaching and conducting studies. Understanding researcher positionality through racial and cultural awareness is especially important when conducting research with minoritized individuals of color (Milner, 2007).

To understand researcher positionality through cultural awareness, it is important to begin with foundational questions that foster reflection of self. Self-reflection allows researchers to raise racially and culturally related interrogations. By doing this, researchers become more aware and mindful of seen, unseen, and unforeseen attitudes, problems, positions, and ways of understanding throughout the research process (Milner, 2007). Self-reflection also allows researchers to critically challenge both personal perspectives and those within the world in which we live. After self-reflection, researchers should reflect about one's self in relation to others, particularly in regard to the communities and individuals being studied. In doing this, researchers identify the contributions brought to research by participants. Complex identities, realities, and cultural roles shape communities, so it is essential for researchers to become educated about the communities and people that they engage in research to identify the extent and depth of cultural influences at play (Milner, 2007). The third step in comprehending

researcher positionality is moving from reflection of self to examining deeper structural impediments that may impact communities and individuals being studied. Understanding the broader institutional, systemic forces which impact individuals of color is imperative; this debunks notions of individual responsibility placed on communities for their own conditions. According to Milner (2007), in order for researchers to challenge, uproot, and change the lived experiences of individuals and communities, it is integral to conduct research from an emancipatory approach which can be achieved using a critical race perspective. Thus, the emancipatory perspective will guide the current study and will especially be observed through the analysis of data.

As a researcher exploring the experiences of young Black male collegians, it was my responsibility to follow the steps to better understand my positionality. First, being a Black male myself and having certain lived experiences within higher education and beyond informed my initial approach to this research. The cultural familiarity (Museus, 2014) I have gained allows me to understand what it is like to be a Black male in the United States and at a HWI, where race and racism are deeply woven. Although I have similar experiences as the target population of Black male collegians, I realize that our experiences vary. For instance, I attended a HWI as an undergraduate student and understand what it means to be a Black man in the U.S. Therefore, it was of utmost importance that I centered this study around the voices of the participants and glean as much as possible from their encounters without projecting my experiences onto the study participants. As aforementioned, Black males are not a monolith and this is also true for HWIs; therefore, I was careful not to misrepresent or generalize my positionality nor the students in each case, which can have a crucial bearing on the study (Milner, 2007).

**Ethical Considerations.** Throughout the research process, numerous ethical considerations arose (Creswell, 2013). Based on the research design and types of data that were collected for examination of each case, identifiable student, programmatic, and institutional information were at risk. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect confidentiality and anonymity of students, programs, program staff, and institutions. Data were coded electronically from all audio, visual, and written recordings and documentation. All collected data were stored on password-protected devices and computers. Any potential risks (i.e. identification, program or institutional backlash, perceived deficiencies, or any unforeseen risks) associated with participating in the study will be communicated to institutions, programs, program advisors, and students. In accordance with case-study research protocol, a report of brief findings will be provided to each site, including recommendations (see Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2004).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CASE ONE: THE BLACK MALE NETWORK AT ST. MATTHEW UNIVERSITY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief case description and setting of the Black Male Network (pseudonym), a BMI program at St. Matthew University (pseudonym). As BMIs are fairly new to college campuses and research is limited on these programs, it is important to provide background information on the program that establishes a level context for understanding how the program works and impacts students. To offer the description of the case and setting, I relied on documents provided by the BMN program staff. These documents provided historical information, as well as the mission, purpose, structure, features, and engagement of the program. Also, demographic information on each of the case study participants is provided within the chapter. Each of the participants self-disclosed this information using the Student Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix C). A focus group interview was conducted for this case study, so the major thematic findings from this interview are also presented in this chapter.

#### **Institutional Setting**

*St. Matthew University* (SMU) is a large, public, land-grant university located in the southern region of the U.S. The university holds a Carnegie Classification (2015) of highest research activity. Founded in the late 1800s, the university has grown to have a current total undergraduate student enrollment of 48,500. The Black student population constitutes approximately 4% of the total student population, and the Black male population is 45.5% compared to the Black female population of 54.5%. The university has over 130 undergraduate degree programs and more than 1,100 student organizations.

The university has placed the value of diversity at its core and embarked on a diversity plan designed to enhance accountability, climate, and equity. Of the many initiatives in this diversity plan, a BMI program, known as the Black Male Network (BMN) was created to increase engagement, retention, and graduation among the university's Black male undergraduate population.

### **History of the BMN**

Based on the BMN Operations Manual, the BMN program was launched in the fall of 2015, based on observed trends revealing low retention, success, and graduation among the Black male student population at SMU. The BMN engages Black males on campus with a variety of developmental, community service, social, and educational activities that are intended to build camaraderie among the Black males on campus. The BMN aims to motivate and empower its Black male participants through exposure to proven strategies for greater professional and personal success, in addition to mentorship and various engagement activities. The program is institutionally supported through the university's Division of Multicultural Affairs, which includes providing a staff member to advise the program and annual funds for program operation. The mission of the Division of Multicultural Affairs is to provide educational and developmental services for underrepresented, minoritized populations and diversity education programs that foster inclusive learning environments and academic excellence for all students by addressing climate. The purpose of the department is to (1) support, advocate for, and challenge underrepresented students as they transition, work through the impact of identity development, and are confronted with challenges to their perspectives and (2) educate

students and student groups about difference through sensitivity, cultural competence, and inclusive leadership training.

### **Mission and Purpose of the BMN**

According to the Operations Manual provided by the BMN Program Advisor, the mission of the BMN program is to provide a space where Black male collegians can build relationships, share experiences and form bonds that foster a sense of pride and belonging. More specifically, the mission of BMN is to: (1) develop a sense of mattering and connection to the institution, (2) work together toward a common purpose, and (3) serve as role models and build community with other Black males. Sense of belonging was intentionally used to inform the BMN program and mission from inception as it seeks to create a sense of mattering and connectivity among the Black male undergraduate student population at SMU. The BMN aims to further address the following goals: (1) enhancing the perception and presence of Black males, (2) establishing stronger connections and information sharing benefiting Black males, (3) building community among Black males, and (4) mentoring Black males both at SMU and in the local community.

### **Structure of the BMN**

The BMN is structured into four levels of membership: an Advisory Board, an Executive Board, a peer mentor initiative, and the general membership; all students are collectively known as members of the BMN. Additionally, a Program Advisor is responsible for advising and providing support to the BMN program, as well as other staff members in the Division of Multicultural Affairs. The expectations of the Program Advisor range from attending all BMN meetings and events to referring students to

campus resources to promote their success. The Advisory Board and Executive Board are intended to serve as the primary support system of the program. The Advisory Board includes the Program Advisor and two to three previous BMN student-leaders responsible for providing advice and guidance to the Executive Board. The Executive Board serves as the governing body of the BMN program and have the responsibility of coordinating and overseeing all BMN activities, which includes all programming, planning, marketing, recruiting, organizing, and mentoring needs. The Executive Board includes six elected officers, each of which are tasked with different functions of the program. “Engage” is a peer mentor initiative comprised of upperclassmen (seniors, juniors, and sophomores) who volunteer to serve as mentors for freshmen and/or first-year transfer mentees. The BMN leadership team, including an Advisory Board and Executive Board, works in conjunction with the Program Advisor to coordinate all programming, planning, marketing, recruiting, organizing, and mentoring activities of the program.

### **Program Engagement and Features of BMN**

Engagement in the BMN program occurs in various ways through meetings, signature events, trips, and collaborations with other organizations. On a weekly basis, Executive Board meetings are held to plan and coordinate all BMN events and operations. General meetings for all members are held on monthly basis. Additionally, students are engaged in signature events such as an excursion trip, a Black Male Think Tank, Barbershop Talks, and an intramural football tournament. The excursion trip is a collaboration with United Gentlemen’s League (UGL), a men of color centered organization at SMU; the two groups travel collectively to Civil Rights significant

destinations over Spring Break. The Black Male Think Tank is also a partnership with UGL that occurs once a year. The purpose of the think tank is to provide an open forum for Black males to share what they have learned through their participation in the BMN or UGL and to discuss challenges they face in society and at SMU. Although the think tank is geared toward members of either the BMN or UGL, all Black males at SMU are able to attend and share their insight.

The BMN's Barbershop Talk series offers Black males a more consistent, bi-weekly open-forum on campus to engage in dialogue surrounding issues impacting them. In this space, students are able to discuss perceptions of the campus community and how they can improve their experience in terms of their college transition, development, and matriculation through SMU. Furthermore, the Barbershop Talks are intended to encourage dialogue about achievements, successes, and issues that face the larger Black male community. This dialogue series is open to all SMU Black males. Lastly, the peer mentor initiative, Engage, is a year-long program designed to provide intentional opportunities to enrich the overall student experience of BMN participants. Mentees within the program are paired with upperclassmen who serve as mentors to assist with addressing and overcoming the stressors that exist for Black males in hopes of helping freshmen better navigate college. Through this relationship, upperclassmen are able to share their insight on navigating college from their experiences and what they have learned, which can be advantageous to Black male first-year students. According to the Executive Board Members, the BMN provides support to approximately 150 Black male students, with approximately 75 who are consistently engaged at moderate to high levels of engagement as tracked by their attendance at BMN events.

## Case Study Participants

This case-study is centered on information obtained from focus group interview data consisting of four student-participants involved in the BMN program at SMU. Each of these students served as leaders on the BMN Executive Board. All four students self-identified as male and Black or African-American. At the time of data collection, three of the students were classified as seniors and one was classified as a sophomore. The self-reported grade point averages of the students ranged from 2.7 to 2.875 on a 4.0 scale. All of the students were involved in at least one other organization beyond their involvement in BMN. Two students had been engaged in BMN for three years, and the other two students had been engaged in the program for two years. Table 3 provides demographic information for each of the case study participants.

Table 3. BMN Student Demographic Information

<b>Student</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>GPA</b>	<b>Engagement</b>
Jared	Black	Engineering	Sophomore	2.875	2 years
James	Black	Telecommunication	Junior	2.7	2 years
Chief	Black	Environmental Science	Senior	2.8	3 years
Devonte	Black	Architecture	Senior	2.8	3 years

Jared, a sophomore Engineering major, has been involved in the BMN for two years, which means he was involved in the program as a freshman. Besides the BMN, Jared is a member of the National Society of Black Engineers, a mentor in a freshman orientation program for minoritized students, and an executive for an annual student leadership conference. Jared's dream position is to be a CEO of a company. Jared revealed that he grew up in a single-parent, middle-class household being raised by his

mother. He indicated that his father attended college but did not graduate. Like many of the other students in this case-study, Jared attributed his motivation to pursue a college education with the influence of his parents. As communicated by Jared, “I was [also] right there in a middle class [area], so college was kind of expected from my parents.” When reflecting on his student experience at SMU, Jared shared that his experience was good although he experienced culture shock. Socially, Jared shared that he felt outnumbered at SMU among the majority White student population, where he was asked several times to “rap,” dance, and perform stereotypical notions of Black culture. After multiple racialized encounters, Jared shared how he sought opportunities to engage with the Black student population to ease the culture shock at SMU.

James, a senior Telecommunication major with a minor in Leadership, has been engaged in BMN for two years. Other than being involved in the BMN, James is a part of an athletic-based organization. After graduation, he plans to pursue a career in social media marketing. James indicated that he was raised in a two-parent, middle-class family. He shared how his mom, a high school graduate, and his father, who obtained an Associate’s degree, constantly promoted a higher education, which was the impetus for him attending college. As James explained, “I always had parents, my parents saying go to college, get yourself a better future, so I decided that's what I was going to do.” When asked about student experience at SMU, Jared shared how he also experienced being outnumbered and not seeing many Black students on campus. According to Jared, once he connected with other Black students and organizations, he felt more of a connection to SMU and his student experience was enhanced.

Chief, a senior Environmental Science major with a minor in Bioenvironmental Science, had been highly engaged in the BMN for three years since its inception. At the time of the study, he was engaged in one other organization in addition to his participation in the BMN. Throughout his time at SMU, Chief also participated in the university's ROTC program. Chief has been awarded with two highly competitive scholarships. In the future, he aspires to become a plant geneticist. Chief was raised in a two parent, upper-middle class family. Both of his parents obtained a Masters Degree, and therefore, he attributed his parents for being influential in his motivation for attending college. As he stated, "I came from an upper-middle class area, so [college] was just kind of expected." Chief reflected on his student journey by mentioning that like the other men he encountered being the only Black male in his major and classes. Although Chief shared that he had not faced overt racism at SMU, he discussed how White students would make subtle Black jokes or other micro-aggressions.

Devonte, a senior majoring in Architecture and minoring in Leadership and Development, had also been highly engaged in the BMN for three years. He has held three different leadership positions within the BMN. In addition to his involvement in BMN, he was involved in a historically-Black fraternity and another Black male-centered organization. Devonte aspires to a career in urban and regional planning. As a first-generation college student, Devonte reported growing up in a low-income area, to which he credited as a motivator for attending college and persisting toward a college degree. As he expressed:

My motivation for attending college was really based off the area and the neighborhood that I grew up in. From [a city in the Southwest part of the U.S.], I

grew up in a low-income family and an underprivileged neighborhood. I saw that furthering my education would be my ticket out, so [college] was my route to success.

While recounting his college experience at SMU, Devonte expressed how he faced many challenges—one being the loss of his father in college while trying to balance and get acclimated to college. As he further added:

I had to go through [the death of my dad] and also deal with classes and the different micro-aggressions and stereotypes I have to face every day. I had been getting asked: ‘what sports do you play?’ ‘you in boxing?’ ‘you run track?’ I hate that; why can't I just be here to get my education, why can't I be here academically? Or [people will ask], ‘oh you must be here on a scholarship.’ No, I'm just here trying to go to school just like you.

Devonte's experience represents daily racialized insults Black men face at HWIs and in the U.S. These micro-aggressions perpetuate hostile college environments, add to Black students' racial battle fatigue, and can impact students' social and academic success. Despite the obstacles Devonte faced, he persisted and excelled in college, nonetheless.

All of the men who participated in this case study demonstrated high levels of engagement in the BMN program through their leadership, which required them to serve as mentors and attend meetings, study groups, workshops, service projects, Barbershop Talks, and program travel opportunities. Collectively, these men agreed to participate in the study based on their engagement and longevity with the BMN program.

### **Case Findings**

Analysis of the focus group interview data revealed three primary themes attributed to increases in sense of belonging among student-participants: (1) Connecting and Retaining Black Males, (2) Providing Educational and Transformative Experiences; and (3) Creating a Safe Haven. Each of these themes and their impact on sense of belonging are discussed in the following sections. Direct quotes from students are used to ensure that their voices are heard regarding their experiences at HWIs and in the BMN program, as well as the meaning they make of these experiences.

*Connecting and Retaining Black Males.* When asked about the purpose of and their engagement in the BMN, the young men in this case study collectively indicated that the program was paramount to their undergraduate experience and success. Each of the men highlighted obstacles they faced in college such as encountering a rough high school-to-college transition, culture shock, racial isolation and being outnumbered, struggling academically and socially, and an unwelcoming campus environment that they were able to overcome through their involvement in the BMN. Connecting with other Black men was highly salient among the men in this case study; two of the men stated that the purpose of the BMN was to connect Black male undergraduates at SMU, providing them with a space to build relationships with other Black males. As Devonte expressed:

The purpose of the [BMN] is to connect [Black] men on campus so we have [a] sense of connection, a sense of belonging. Hearing from others it could be a cultural shock to them, so we want to help guys kind of evade that cultural shock and help them get acclimated to college.

Devonte specifically pinpointed sense of belonging as a significant component of the mission of the BMN, which is consistent with the mission statement of the BMN provided in the program brochure:

The mission of the BMN is to provide a space where Black males can build relationships, share experiences and form bonds that foster a sense of pride and belonging. The mission of BMN is to (1) develop a sense of mattering and connection to the institution, (2) work together toward a common purpose, and (3) serve as role models and build community with other Black males.

Similarly, James stated, “I would just say simply that [the purpose] is having younger Black males here and having them connect with us and that they really appreciate what we are doing. It is a really great feeling.” James’ statement also highlighted the BMN mission, particularly in how the program aims to foster a space where relationships are built, students can feel that they matter, and they can connect to the institution.

Not only did students identify Black male connectivity as a purpose of the BMN, but they also described how the program unites Black males on campus. Study participants identified ways in which the BMN united its Black male participants to collectively achieve academically, proving to the campus community and greater society that Black men can indeed thrive and be successful. As Jared passionately declared:

For me, it is kind of like what Chief was talking about with the tension [we face]. Because I feel like the world already thinks that we cannot do it [graduate from college], so it is important that we stay united together to prove to them that we actually can.

Additionally, Devonte responded in this way:

This organization is very much needed because everybody has their own story, different type of minds, different type of feeling, different type of emotion of how they are dealing with [adversity], but you know BMN gives us that united purpose to excel.

Based on the obstacles and adversity identified by students in this case-study, it was important for them to overcome those obstacles and adversity, break stereotypes, and achieve academic success, all to ensure they are also successful overall after college. The desire for unity among Black males identified particularly by Jared and Devonte, exhibits collectivist orientations (Museus, 2014) often embodied by the Black community and other communities of color. These collectivist orientations personify notions of collective, group efforts rather than individualistic, solitary notions. Also, these collectivist orientations allow students not to feel alone (see Brooms, 2016) and supports the unification identified by BMN participants to excel, which can help students combat feelings of being isolated and outnumbered in environments such as HWIs.

As the BMN provided opportunities for the men in this case-study to be connected and unified with other Black males, the students were also given opportunities to be held accountable and receive help from their peers. As stated by Devonte:

We really tend to reach out to younger [Black] males, like freshmen and sophomores to help them stay here because you know, there is not that many of us. Our main goal is for us to all graduate in four years. That is the main goal and we want to hold each other accountable for that.

In this statement, Devonte highlighted a key aspect of the BMN program, which is its mentor program that pairs freshmen with upperclassmen to bolster their experience in the

program as well as at SMU. Furthermore, Devonte reiterated the need and relevance for the BMN program based on the small Black male student population on campus and how the BMN program seeks to increase retention and graduation rates for its participants. In relation to the accountability and motivation to persist as a result of being involved in organizations such as BMN, Jared expressed:

And you know, we [have] all seen people who came in here and they are no longer here. And those are normally people that are not as involved as others. So we see that being involved can help you stay here, because it keeps you motivated and you have someone being accountable to you and things of that nature. So we know the biggest thing is potential so that we can graduate.

The accountability and motivation highlighted by the participants of this case study in the BMN program are essential to increasing persistence among Black males at SMU.

Based on the narratives provided by the men in this case study, it was evident that the BMN was effective in connecting and uniting Black males participating in the program through relationship building with peers and upperclassmen; this was achieved through the BMN mentor program. Through participation in the BMN mentor program, students were able to share and learn tips and strategies to aid in successfully navigating college and persisting. In addition to being connected with other Black males, the BMN educated and transformed students in various ways.

*Providing Educational and Transformative Experiences.* Each of the four participants in this case study described various ways in which they encountered both educational and transformative experiences throughout their participation in the BMN. These experiences allowed the study participants to learn more about themselves and

other students, particularly their Black male peers, in addition to becoming more aware of societal factors impacting Black men at various levels. Although the study participants were from different backgrounds, they were challenged to all broaden their knowledge and understanding of other Black men from multifarious backgrounds and circumstances. According to students, this was achieved primarily through the bi-weekly Barbershop Talks hosted by the BMN.

According to the men in the case study, the Barbershop Talks provided Black males with a space to talk about issues impacting them specifically. As Devonte explained:

... Barbershop Talks...that is the time that we all come together and bond as one group, as brothers; [it] is an opportunity to value each other and know what we struggle with. Someday I might have trouble ... my friend right here [may] feel the same way.

Jared further explained:

I definitely agree [on] Barbershop Talks...like I was saying earlier, just being able to express everything you are feeling, whatever you [have] going on. Especially when [we] ask 'what's good in the hood?', you get to say what has been going good in your week...everyone congratulates you. [If] you have some troubles, you can share your troubles, and then some of the older guys may have some advice or link you up with somebody for help. It is very helpful overall.

For Chief, the Barbershop Talks were monumental to his BMN experience. In regard to the purpose of BMN, he shared:

It's been educational for me, just because of my position [in BMN] I have to make presentations about the plight of the Black man in America. And...having done it so much I have definitely learned a lot. I've been able to facilitate these conversations and ask fellow Black men about where they come from [and] their experiences. It has really opened my eyes to what being Black in America looks like. It's not one story, it is multiple stories sewn together, and I don't know, it's just been really eye opening for me.

As a student-leader on BMN's Leadership Team, Chief is tasked with developing, preparing, and facilitating the discussion topic for each Barbershop Talk. Chief's middle-class upbringing did not expose him to the various backgrounds and experiences of other Black males and individuals from lower class status, so therefore the BMN Barbershop Talks provided him the opportunity to gain exposure and insight into the backgrounds of his peers. Also, the Barbershop Talks allowed him to contextualize and make meaning of how Black men, while connected through rich history and racial identity, are not a monolith—having the exact same life experiences and circumstances. This experience underscores a strength of the BMN program in connecting and uniting Black males across ethnic and class lines. Chief further added:

BMN for me has been a culture shock, it's been lessons, it's just been things I wouldn't have known or wouldn't even bothered with if I hadn't been in this organization. If I'd stayed in the ROTC, I wouldn't know any of this stuff [and] I wouldn't know any of these people. It's just ... it's been great!

Based on these descriptions, the Barbershop Talks reinforce and support the sense of connection between students and allows them to bond with others within the BMN.

Additionally, the Barbershop Talks offer a space for students to collectively discuss what it means to be Black and male in the U.S., specifically at SMU, and societal issues that contribute to the condition of Black men. These conversations broaden and help students contextualize their experiences as Black men in the U.S. and on the campus of SMU.

In addition to the educational and transformative nature of the BMN, so passionately expressed by Chief, other students expressed additional examples of the benefits and gratification derived from their BMN involvement. For instance, Devonte detailed his individual and leadership development through the BMN program. He recounted:

And knowing that I helped somebody [through the mentor program], it makes me happy. It helps me strive for better, and it makes me want to do more because hey, I know that I have someone looking up to me. I'm a role model now. I'm a leader. It's just increasing my character, helping me to develop into a better leader, a better man, a better role model.

Similarly, Jared shared:

Basically [in BMN] Black men are able to be brothers, get along, talk about similar struggles, and positive things. And simply by impacting these younger guys, like I said earlier, making sure they do well, so when we are gone they can continue the legacy. I think that is important.

Based on their participation in BMN and serving as mentors, the men in this case-study, as demonstrated by Devonte and Jared, were able to witness their impact on younger participants, which further motivated them to strive to be greater role models and leaders. The individual and leadership development these men encountered in the BMN was

beneficial to their college experience. According to the men, their experience in the BMN was largely positive—so much so that the men mentioned how they wanted the program to be sustained for future students who would continue the legacy of building brotherhood and learning from and impacting one another.

*Creating a Safe Haven.* According to the narratives of the case study participants, BMN offered Black men at SMU’s campus a safe, judge-free environment where students could talk freely and openly about issues affecting them. Students accredited the Barbershop Talks as the catalyst for creating this safe haven. Although students described SMU and its majority White population to be an unwelcoming atmosphere at times for Black males, BMN created a safe haven for them to which they could escape mundane encounters of micro-aggressions, racial isolation, and gendered racism. This safe haven proved to be integral for many of the students. As Devonte conveyed, “...Barbershop Talks...is brothers [discussing] different struggles; its different, the atmosphere, that culture...is something great.” James, in agreement, added, “it’s a no judging zone; you get to laugh [and] you are with people that are similar to you who don’t judge.” As Jared affirmed:

For me, I would have to say [BMN has] been like a safe zone, because it seemed like freshmen year when everything else was going wrong, the one thing I could depend on, you know you could meet up on Thursdays, you could talk to your brothers here about anything that was going on. You don't have to worry about being judged or anything. [Its] just ... like counseling, but just a stress reliever basically. A lot of stuff goes on here [at SMU], and if you don't have anybody to talk to, you know, who knows what you're going through it can be hard. So I'm

very thankful for BMN; I'm still involved and I hope we can make that difference for the freshmen coming in.

From Jared's account, the bi-weekly frequency of the discussion Barbershop Talks series offers the safe haven to students on a consistent basis, on which they can depend and anticipate. Having a consistent, safe outlet is imperative for students to evade the negative experiences often experienced at HWIs. This can help to reduce Black male college dropout, poor academic performance, racial battle fatigue, and many other negative effects stemming from the gendered racism faced by Black males.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed description of the BMN program, the site chosen for this case-study. This description began with profiling the institution where the program is located. Next, various aspects of the BMN program were outlined including the history, mission and purpose, structure, and the various forms of engagement. A brief description of the participants was provided to allow the voices of the students to emerge. Lastly, the findings of the case-study were presented. The major findings of this case included three salient themes that include: (1) Connecting and Retaining Black Males, (2) Providing Educational and Transformative Experiences; and (3) Creating a Safe Haven. These findings help us understand (a) the characteristics of this BMI program, (b) the experiences of students in this BMI program, and (c) how this BMI program fostered sense of belonging among students. While other themes emerged from the data, these themes were most pertinent to the conceptual framework of sense of belonging. Based on the student narratives, the BMN program has demonstrated effectiveness in its mission

and purpose to provide a space where Black males at SMU can connect, experience a sense of belonging, and work toward a common purpose of being successful.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CASE TWO: THE BLACK MALE LEAGUE AT HUDSON UNIVERSITY

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a brief description of the case and setting of the Black Male League (pseudonym), a BMI program at Hudson University (pseudonym). Due to the newness of BMIs on college campuses and the limited amount of research on these programs, it is imperative to provide contextual information on the program that establishes a level of understanding in relation to how the program serves and influences students. To provide the description of the case and setting, I utilized documents provided by the BMI Program Advisor. These documents provided the mission, purpose, structure, features, and methods of engagement within the program. Demographic information on the case study participants is also provided within this chapter. Each of the participants self-disclosed this information using the Student Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix C). A focus group interview was conducted for this case study, and the major thematic findings from this interview are presented in this chapter.

#### **Institutional Profile**

*Hudson University* (HU) is a medium-sized, public, state university located in the southern region of the U.S. that was established in the late 1700s. According to the Carnegie Classification (2015), HU is categorized with the highest research activity. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the university reported an undergraduate student enrollment of approximately 16,000 (program website). The Black student population constituted approximately 11% of the total student population (NCES, 2017), and the Black male population was 49% compared to the Black female population of 51% of the

total Black student population (program website). The university has over 60 undergraduate degree programs and more than 400 student organizations. HU's BMI program, the Black Male League (BML), was implemented to meet the distinct needs of Black males and ultimately enhance the educational experiences and graduation rates of these students.

### **History of the BML**

According to a BML historical document, HU identified trends of low retention and graduation among the Black male student population during the 2010-2011 academic year. To address these disparities the university composed a task force of various campus stakeholders charged with researching, creating, and implementing strategies to support the retention, graduation, and success of Black males at the university. The BML program was implemented in the fall of 2011 as a result of the work done by the task force. The BML program was intentionally created from an anti-deficit perspective, consistent with Harper's (2009a; 2010; 2012) work. From its inception, the program has been institutionally supported through the university's cultural center, which means that the center designates staff and annual funding for the program to operate. The HU Cultural Center aims to meet the needs of under-represented, minoritized groups of students on campus, many of whom are Black students. The center serves as a hub of involvement, research, and programming for the entire HU campus population, and strives to increase the multicultural competence of university faculty, staff, and students.

### **Mission and Purpose of the BML**

Based on the BML marketing brochure, the program seeks to increase retention, persistence, graduation, engagement, and overall success of Black males by addressing

various scholastic and social aspects through (1) building peer connections, (2) engaging students academically and socially, and (3) providing mentor support. More specifically, BML is concerned with achieving year-to-year increases in first-year Black undergraduate male retention, and to increase the four, five, and six-year graduation rates of Black male undergraduate students. Strategically, BML aims to remove barriers to student success by offering summer bridge programs to ease the high school-to-college transition, providing opportunities for brotherly bonding and peer support, fostering mentoring relationships, and connecting students to student organizations, as well as campus support services and resources. The learning outcomes of the BML program indicates that students should be able to (a) clearly articulate the challenges to successful attainment of a bachelor's degree; (b) logically reason to find purposeful solutions to navigate matriculation and graduation barriers; (c) connect the relevance of campus and community networking to the successful completion of college; and (d) apply learned skills to successfully navigate the campus culture. BML relies on evaluation data and participant feedback to ensure participants are continually supported and challenged as they persist toward graduation.

### **Structure of the BML**

The BML program is structured as part of the Retention and Evaluation unit of the HU Cultural Center, which is responsible for designing and implementing academic support services and conducting program evaluation. A Program Advisor is designated to provide leadership to the BML program and students, in addition to coordinating all program activities. A student leadership team consisting of six students works in conjunction with the Program Advisor to plan and coordinate BML events.

## **Program Engagement and Features of the BML**

According to the BML brochure, the program is guided by four pillars: academic engagement, mentor support, peer connection, and student involvement and leadership development. Academic engagement is central to the program because it helps students pursue academic majors consistent with their individual values and career goals.

Academic engagement begins for students in an early-arrival program, which is a free two-day summer bridge program aimed at helping to ease the transition from high school to college. The bridge program allows students to move in to the residence halls prior to other students moving in and engages students through workshops and social events to connect with peers and the institution. All BML participants are offered individualized academic coaching with the Program Advisor and other staff in the Cultural Center, who also serve as mentors and promoters of academic success. The academic coaching offered to BML participants consists of personalized, one-on-one meetings to assist students in maximizing their collegiate experiences and provide support through any challenges. The BML academic coaching model fosters student development and opportunities to overcome barriers through intrusive advising and preventative measures that help students identify barriers (i.e. academic, financial, personal, professional, etc.) and take the appropriate actions. Additionally, students are encouraged to make use of campus services based on their specific needs, such as tutoring, mentoring, academic advising, and Student Success Center events, to name a few.

Mentor support is an essential aspect of the BML program; a number of campus mentors are available to all BML participants. The BML Program Advisor serves as the primary mentor for students and additional staff, faculty, alumni, and community

members serve as additional mentors. In addition, efforts are made to provide networking opportunities for students to connect with professional mentors based on their career aspirations. In tandem with mentor support, opportunities for strong peer connections are an integral component of the BML program. The mentor and peer connections are established through the program and further supported through a number of social activities. For instance, at the beginning of every fall semester BML hosts a welcome and networking event, which is an opportunity for students to become acquainted with other BML participants, program alumni, and Black men at the university (i.e. faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate students)

Lastly, BML encourages student involvement and provides opportunities for leadership development. Each BML participant is encouraged to participate and become engaged in student organizations. Several BML participants are involved with United Brotherhood (UB), the student organization extension of the BML program. UB provides BML participants with a brotherly support network within the program that encourages service and reinforces social integration. In addition to UB, all BML participants are encouraged to become involved in additional student organizations. As of the fall semester of the 2017-2018 academic year, incoming first-year students in BML have the opportunity to participate in the UB Living-Learning Community, which is a collaborative, structured community experience where students living in residence halls take two to four classes together. Additionally, students are engaged in social activities and leadership development opportunities such as a suit and tie workshop, the BML Honors Gala, Barbershop Talks, game nights, intramural sports teams, and leadership retreats and conferences.

## Case Study Participants

The current case-study is based on data obtained from a focus group interview consisting of five study participants who are Black male students engaged in the BML program at HU. Three of the participants self-identified as Black or African-American, while two of the participants self-identified as bi-racial. When the data were collected, two of the students were classified as seniors and three were classified as sophomores. The self-reported grade point averages of the students ranged from 2.4 to 3.76 on a 4.0 scale with a mean grade point average of 3.215. All of the students were involved in a minimum of two organizations beyond their involvement in BML. Four of the students had been engaged in BML for two years, while one of the students had been engaged in the program for four years. Table 4 provides demographic information for each of the case study participants.

Table 4. BML Student Demographic Information

<b>Student</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>GPA</b>	<b>Engagement</b>
Diego	Bi-racial	Accounting	Sophomore	3.2	2 years
Keith	Bi-racial	Accounting	Sophomore	3.76	2 years
Mark	Black	Biology	Sophomore	--	2 years
Braeden	Black	Exercise Science	Senior	3.5	4 years
Xavier	Black	Sport Administration	Senior	2.4	2 years

Mark, a sophomore Biology major, had been engaged in BML for two years. Other than being involved in the BML, Mark is involved in the Residence Hall Association at HU. Mark indicated that he was raised in a single-parent, low-income household. He shared how his mom obtained an Associate's degree. After graduation, Mark plans to go to medical school and become a doctor, specifically a pediatric surgeon.

When asked about his motivation for attending college, Mark explained, “I’ve always wanted to be a doctor for as long as I can remember, so going to college was the first step to doing that.”

Diego, a sophomore Accounting major, had been engaged in the BML for two years including his first and second year in college. At the time of the study, he was involved in two other organizations beyond his engagement in the BML—one being the Black Student Union. In 2017, Diego made the Dean’s List and was selected for a scholarship program at HU. Diego aspires to become a police sergeant and bring change to policing in the U.S. based on the recent state of police violence against the Black community. Diego was raised in a single-parent, middle-class home. Both of Diego’s parents obtained college degrees, which was the impetus for him attending college.

Keith, also a sophomore Accounting major, was engaged in the BML for two years beginning his first year at HU. During the time of the study, he held a leadership position in the BML. In addition to his involvement in BML, Keith was involved in the Black Student Union. Keith made the Dean’s List three semesters consecutively beginning his freshman year. In the future, Keith aspires to become an accountant. As a second-generation college student, he reported that he grew up in a single-parent, middle class family. Both of Keith’s parents earned college degrees, and he attributed his motivation for attending college to observing his mom obtain a college degree. As he shared, “Well, I mean I always wanted to go to college just because my mom just got her Associate’s [degree], so I wanted to get a four-year Bachelor’s [degree].”

Braeden, a senior Exercise Science major, had been involved in the BML for four years since his freshman year. During this time, he has held three leadership positions in

BML. Besides being engaged in the BML, Braeden is a highly involved student as evidenced by his involvement in (a) the Black Student Union, (b) Collegiate 100 (a mentoring program for Black males transitioning from high school to college), (c) a campus-based violence prevention team, and (d) HU's admission recruitment team. Academically, Braeden maintained a high GPA and made the Dean's List two consecutive fall semesters. He aspires to become an orthopedic physician assistant. Braeden revealed that he grew up in a two-parent, middle-class family with both parents being four-year college graduates. Similar to several students in this case-study, Braeden credited his motivation to pursue a college education to his parents. Braeden stated:

I guess you could say that my motivation for attending college was seeing that my parents attended; they had kind of influenced me to go. But I always just figured [it] was not a trend, but a thing I had to do to better my life, better my future, get a better job, plan for the future, stuff like that.

Xavier, a senior Sport Administration major and Communication minor, has been engaged in the BML for two years. During the study, he was a part-time supervisor working to offset the cost of attending college. Xavier aspires to one day become an athletic director. He shared that he was raised in a two-parent, upper middle-class family; both of his parents obtained bachelor's degrees. As stated by other men in this case-study, Xavier's motivation to attend college was influenced by his parents.

All of the men who participated in this case study were recommended for participation by the Program Advisor, Cortez, based on their longevity and high levels of engagement in the BML program to date. The men served as either leaders and mentors in the program or general members who attended a majority of the program events

including meetings, retreats, service projects, game nights, Barbershop Talks, and travel opportunities.

### **Case Findings**

The findings for this case-study emerged at the conclusion of the data analysis process. The data analysis highlighted three primary themes associated with increasing sense of belonging for the student-participants in this case-study: (1) Experiencing the Benefits of Brotherhood; (2) Acquiring Skills to Navigate College; and (3) Undergoing Growth and Development. All three of these themes and their influence on students' sense of belonging are discussed in the sections to follow. I intentionally draw on direct quotes from students in the case study to capture the voices of Black males regarding their experiences at HWIs and in the BMN program at HU, in addition to the meaning they make of these experiences.

*Experiencing the Benefits of Brotherhood.* Based on narratives from the participants in this case-study, the BML program was pivotal to their undergraduate experience and social integration. En masse, the men highlighted unfavorable encounters faced at HU such as experiencing culture shock, feeling isolated, being outnumbered, and dealing with racial micro-aggressions from White professors and students. For these men, the BML program served as an enclave to counterbalance the aforementioned aspects of their experiences by providing an environment for Black males to engage with one another and evade the hostility they faced on campus. Thus, the BML became increasingly imperative to the college experiences of the Black men in this study.

Repeatedly, the participants in this case-study indicated that they were able to experience a growing bond of brotherhood and relationship-building throughout their

participation in the BML. Being able to encounter a space devoted specifically for Black men proved to be a salient desire for the men in this case-study. In fact, as Mark stated:

I look at [BML] as a space where people who look like each other can come together and not feel so alone on campus; [also] to help us realize that we can work together and achieve our common goals. Like having brothers to help push each other.

Similarly, Xavier added:

Programs like this are good because it creates that [environment] where somebody can share if they feel a certain type of way or they can feel comfortable about talking about something. And then you know you have people that got your back, so people are going to let you know...what they've gone through [at HU].

Braeden added:

...having BML on campus with all the Black males having the same goal of graduating, it just makes [college] a little bit easier getting to bond with the guys and become friends with everyone...we can motivate each other, give each other tips, [and] talk about classes. Seeing someone just like you with the same backgrounds, it helps—it motivates you.

Lastly, Keith expressed, "...for some, they don't have brothers or even an older sibling, so to have somebody to lean on and stuff, it's very helpful." As Mark mentioned, being able to connect with other Black men made students feel as though they were not alone as Black men at HU, a historically and predominantly White college campus. This helped to reduce feelings of being racially isolated that many of the men identified as characteristic of their student experience at HU. Additionally, as the men alluded to, the

brotherhood united and motivated them in multiple ways. Perhaps most significant was their collective motivation to excel and persist toward completing their degrees. As all of the students highlighted, experiencing this type of brotherhood through BML was beneficial to their college journey. Additionally, in the words of Braeden, the brotherhood helped to make college seem easier and more manageable. With persistence and academic success being the main goals of the BML, this a success for the program.

The brotherhood, unity, motivation, and persistence highlighted by the men in this case study is best achieved through the space BML fosters for students to share their lived college experiences. In this way, students were not only able to share their experiences, but they also had the opportunity to teach their peers some of the challenges and pitfalls they faced and share ways to overcome or avoid those same challenges. Likewise, students are able to learn from their peers' experiences and receive advice for their personal journey. Being able to learn strategies to navigate or avoid challenges other Black men have faced increases sense of belonging and student success for less experienced students. Xavier shared a personal example from his own experience of coming to HU, having to leave, and then coming back to reenroll. When he had to leave HU, he enrolled in a community college nearby for three semesters and continued to pursue his educational goals. Despite having to leave HU, Xavier persisted nonetheless, and for him, his story is a testament for other Black males that may have challenges and want to give up on college. As he passionately stated:

...they can't get through it—[college]. I like to be a testament and let people know that look, no matter what, you got it, you can do it. Just to be that kind of big brother, because some people need that. Not everybody has siblings in their

life, so I like to try to be a big brother or just be somebody that somebody could lean on, whether it's big brother or not, just be a friend. I like the brotherhood in the group as well, between everybody.

Xavier further shared:

Personally, I like the fact that I can give back to people that have been in my position. You know, we all go through freshman, sophomore, [junior], senior year—and this is my senior year, so there are situations that I've gone through and that I've learned from. If I can help somebody not make that mistake or if it's not a sort of mistake, if it's just a challenge that they can overcome and I can give a little bit of advice, I like the fact that I can say, this is what I did when I was a freshman, sophomore, or junior. Give them a little bit of advice, that way they know, kind of which route they might want to take versus going in kind of blinded.

Along the same lines, Mark expressed:

I would say one of the most helpful things about [BML] to me has been just seeing how all these men that have gotten to college before me, how they're still having a life and being able to do the things that they want to do but at the same time still getting school work done and doing what they need to do to be successful.

For Xavier and Mark, experiencing a space where upper and lower-classmen could share their experiences and learn from one another was rewarding and inspiring. This transfer of experiential knowledge is essential to increasing persistence for incoming Black males

who engage in the BML program. In addition, it creates a support network that pushes students to achieve and be successful throughout their college journey.

*Acquiring Skills to Navigate College.* In addition to the experience and impact of brotherhood on the men in the BML initiative, the case study participants outlined how they gained particular skills from their participation in the program. More specifically, the men identified learning navigational skills that enhanced their success in college. These navigational skills included better time management and building relationships with professors. Many of the students detailed how they struggled with time management as they transitioned from high school to college. Braeden, for example, recounted how one of his biggest struggles coming into college was time management. He stated, “I didn't really know how to manage time between classes, studying, other extracurricular activities.” When asked how the BML program impacted students, Braeden later exclaimed, “[BML] made you busier, but it was worth it. [It] helps you with time management...”

Further, students were able to learn and discuss the importance of and strategies to building relationships with professors. Both Keith and Braden discussed how they initially struggled with building relationships with their non-Black professors at HU. As Keith shared:

...when it comes to professors, it's almost like they are trying to shape the way you are to be an ideal person to them, an ideal student. You can't really be yourself; you're trying to mold yourself into something they want you to be...I try to relate to them on a personal level, but it's kind of hard sometimes. I've been

lucky to have some [nice] professors...but others aren't as friendly [or] approachable...

Braeden, who on more than one occasion mentioned being one of few if not the only Black male in large, majority White classes, explained:

Especially some of the professors, I was unable to build a relationship at all, just because I went to the office hours and talked and they really weren't open to [pause] they weren't as helpful as they are to other students and stuff like that so, that's [been] my biggest obstacle.

To Braeden's point, Keith followed-up by saying:

...when it comes to trying to get to know your professors, learning how to talk to them and stuff like that...in reference to [BML], some of the general body meetings we've sat down and talked about how you can [approach] a professor; that helped a lot because you get to see it from your brothers that are inside of the [BML].

Although faced with unfriendly encounters when approaching and attempting to build relationships with professors, the men in this case study exhibited both a desire to establish positive relationships with their professors and an understanding of the positive benefits these relationships offer. Students credited the BML program with providing them opportunities to discuss and learn helpful strategies to approaching relationship building with faculty. Positive student-faculty relationships increase sense of belonging by allowing students to feel more connected to the university, which is imperative to increasing student retention and success.

In various way, each of the students recounted how they were exposed to leadership development in the BML, and consequently, their leadership skills were enhanced. For instance, as Diego discussed:

[In BML], you also learn new skills—leadership skills...we all divide into little committees to [plan] different events and we rely on each other's skills. We can use [everyone] skills and their talents...and its cool because we're all coming together.

In the same manner, Braeden added, “being introduced to BML and all the leadership opportunities, which [includes] working with brothers to help plan different events and reach out to other organizations about cohosting events...” From these accounts, the BML program is able to hone the talents, skills, and abilities of each student, while allowing students to acquire other skills and abilities from their peers. All of the BML participants and greater HU campus community also benefit from the leadership skills of these leaders as they create and plan social events, such as the annual gala and welcome program that the BML hosts.

The time management, leadership, and faculty relationship building skills highlighted by the men in this case study proved to be integral to their collegiate experience and academic success. All of these skills helped students navigate the many components of HU and made parts of their college experience seem “easier,” partly because leadership experiences and positive faculty relationships can enhance students’ sense of belonging. Moreover, the skills gained through participating in the BML played a role in the persistence of the men in this study, as well as the persistence of their peers in the program.

*Undergoing Growth and Development.* In addition to experiencing brotherhood and acquiring skills to help navigate college, the participants in this case study demonstrated multiple ways in which they underwent growth and development from their involvement in the BML program. The men conveyed their meaning-making through reflections over their entire college experience and how the BML helped to shape those experiences. As the students explicated, the growth and development they experienced was a necessary part of their college journey. Braeden articulated, “I know with a part of growing up, going to college, and moving away, [is] having to step out of your comfort zone a little bit and that’s what I’ve done.” He accredited his development to what he was able to learn and experience in the BML program. Along the same lines, Diego candidly expressed:

I would say [BML] helped me grow as a person, because I used to be wild (laughs). But it kind of helped ground me and make me take things more seriously. Because the first semester, I had the grades and stuff, but I just didn't really care about college or anything. And now that I'm more involved, I'm seeing my work differently and it's benefitting me.

For Diego and many of the men in this case-study, their social integration into college suffered at the onset of their journeys much more than their academic integration. Based on their narratives, BML brought balance to the academic and social imbalance these men encountered early in their college journeys.

When students reflected on their growth and development, they conveyed how their mindsets and perspectives changed for the better. These mindsets and perspectives allowed students to contextualize and make meaning of their college experiences in

tandem with larger societal phenomena they witnessed at that time. To this point, Xavier shared:

I feel like throughout my four years, I became mentally tough, because I've had to be that way. And there's those times when you want to react, but you got to kind of just think like, 'if I react, how am I going to be seen?' You know what I'm saying? But if someone else did the same exact thing it would be justified. So I've had to become mentally tough to deal with things like that, and [BML] has helped me build that mental toughness.

Xavier's narrative underscores how he coped with racial inequalities faced as a Black man in the U.S., which occurs for many other Black men and racially oppressed groups. In this case, Xavier coped by building mental toughness out of frustration. Xavier's growth and development was on display through his contextualization of dealing with racial encounters and not being able to naturally react due to stereotypes and negative expectations placed on Black males. As he disclosed, BML created an environment where he and other Black males could channel their reactions to racism in a productive manner.

As multiple students discussed, the growth and development experienced throughout their time in BML was key to their college experience. Resultantly, it became apparent to the men that they should in turn make an impact on others at HU and in the greater community as BML had done for them. As Diego discussed: "...its not like we're all coming together in BML and just sitting there; we're trying to put our foot print on the campus to make a change." To Diego's perspective, Keith and Braden added how in the future, they would like for BML to reach more Black males at HU. These desires to

expand the reach of the program reveal collective orientations developed among the men in this case study based on the development, skills acquired, and brotherhood experienced in the BML program.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a detailed description of the BML program at HU, the site chosen for this case-study. First, a profile of HU was given to offer an understanding of the campus setting surrounding the program. Next, various aspects of the BML program were discussed including the history, mission and purpose, structure, and forms of student engagement. A succinct description of the case study participants was provided to begin illuminating the voices of the students. Lastly, the major findings from the case study were highlighted with emphasis on reoccurring themes. Three major themes emanated including: (1) Experiencing Brotherhood; (2) Acquiring Skills to Navigate College; and (3) Undergoing Growth and Development. These three themes help us understand: (a) the features of this BMI program, (b) students' experiences in this program; and (c) how this BMI program increased sense of belonging among students. Undoubtedly, other themes emerged from the data; however, the aforementioned themes were most germane to the conceptual framework of sense of belonging. Based on the student narratives, the BML program demonstrated effectiveness in its mission and purpose to increase retention, engagement, and overall success of Black males by (1) building peer connections, (2) engaging students academically and socially, and (3) providing mentor support. Although formal mentor support was not as prominent among the student narratives, the brotherhood, skill acquisition, and development experienced by

the participants exhibit outcomes similar to what students may have received from mentor support.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CASE THREE: THE BLACK MALE CONNECTION AT GAINES UNIVERSITY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief description of the case and setting of the Black Male Connection (pseudonym), a BMI program at Gaines University (pseudonym). Based on the newness of BMIs on college campuses and limited research on these programs, it is important to provide background information on the BMC that establishes a level context for understanding how the program serves students. To offer the description of the case and setting, I relied on a brochure provided by the BMC Program Advisor. This document provided the mission, purpose, structure, features, and methods of engagement within the BMC. Also, demographic information on each of the case study participants is provided within the chapter. Each of the participants self-disclosed this information using the Student Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix C). A focus group interview was conducted for this case study, so the major thematic findings from this interview are also presented in this chapter.

#### **Institutional Setting**

*Gaines University* (GU) is a mid-sized, public, land-grant university located in the Midwestern region of the U.S. The Carnegie Classification (2015) categorizes GU as having the highest research activity. The university was established in the mid-1800s. The university has over 300 undergraduate degree programs and more than 600 student organizations. With a current total undergraduate student enrollment of 26,000, Black or African-American students make up only eight percent of the student population (NCES, 2017). In 2016, the six-year graduation rate for Black or African-American students was 57%, which was one of the lowest among other racial and ethnic groups (NCES, 2017).

GU created the Black Male Connection (BMC) program to assist in the successful transition of Black males into the collegiate environment.

### **History of the BMC**

Based on the documents provided, the BMC was established in 2009 as a student organization aimed at creating a more welcoming campus environment for Black males at GU, while increasing retention, success, and college completion among this student population. The student organization began as an initiative within the Black Cultural Center (BCC) at GU. At the onset of the organization's existence, student programming was a large part of the efforts to support Black male collegians. After a change in the leadership at the BCC in 2013, the BMC student organization evolved into the program that it is today—a leadership development program. With this change in leadership came several structural changes were implemented, such as the program developing into a first-year, freshmen cohort-based model and integrating a required class to engage the first-year freshmen. The program continues to be institutionally-supported through the BCC.

### **Purpose of the BMC**

As provided by the BMC brochure, the purpose of the program is to aid in the successful transition from high school to college for Black male freshmen. The mission of BMC is to foster a sense of belonging, promote engagement in the curricular and co-curricular aspects of the institution, encourage self-responsibility, and articulate to students the benefits of higher education and the expectations and values of the university. The purpose and mission of BMC are established through three pillars of the program: support, development, and involvement; these pillars guide all program activities.

## **Structure of the BMC**

As previously stated, BMC is institutionally-supported and structured within the GU Black Cultural Center. The structure of the BMC consists of a Program Advisor, a student leadership team, and cohort members in the program. The Program Advisor coordinates and provides leadership and support to BMC. The Program Advisor teaches the required program course, refers students to campus resources, and attends all BMC events. The BMC leadership team is comprised of Black male, upper-classmen who serve as a Program Assistant, a Teaching Assistant, or program mentors, all who work in conjunction with the Program Advisor to coordinate all aspects of the program. The leadership team consists of 6-8 students who have previously matriculated through the BMC program as first-year, freshmen. The Program Assistant and Teaching Assistant help the Program Advisor lead class instruction, discussions, and activities. The additional members of the leadership team serve as mentors and small-group discussion leaders in the class component of the program.

## **Program Engagement and Features of the BMC**

Students in BMC are engaged in multiple ways: (1) with the required first-year, freshmen class, (2) as mentors and leaders, and (3) various program events and activities. The class meets regularly—two days per week in the fall and one day per week in the spring. The class covers various topics ranging from the plight of Black males in society and at GU's campus to teaching navigational skills to be successful in college and beyond. Also, in the class BMC participants encounter various campus departments, leaders, and campus resources available to promote student success. Participants are encouraged to become involved in student organizations, attend various events on

campus, and interact with faculty and staff at GU and local community members. BMC participants are supported through the assessment of their needs early in the program. The program staff and peer mentors work with the freshmen to establish goals for their first year at GU, and then develop long term goals for their college experience.

The leadership team meets weekly to coordinate and plan aspects of the program. Additionally, students are engaged in signature programs such as Pinked Out, Black Aids Day, Alternative Spring Break, blood and bone marrow drives, and other community service projects that give back to the MU and local community. Additionally, students attend required meetings with the Program Coordinator and peer mentors as a means of assessing their experience at GU at various points during their freshman year. Through engagement in BMC, students also gain the necessary skills to emerge as student leaders on GU's campus and beyond. Transferability of these skills is accomplished through several leadership assessments and activities including Venture Out, StrengthsQuest, and the GU Leadership Academy. At the time of the study, the BMC provided support to nearly 33 Black male students, 25 of which were first-year, freshmen.

### **Case Study Participants**

The current case-study is based on data obtained from a focus group interview consisting of six Black male study participants engaged in the BMC program at GU. All six of the participants served as leaders on the BMC Leadership Team at the time of the study. Each of the students self-identified as both male and Black or African-American. At the time of the study, four of the students were classified as sophomores, one student was classified as a junior, and one student was classified as a senior. The students self-reported grade point averages ranging from 2.69 to 3.51 on a 4.0 scale with an overall

average of 3.12. All of the men were involved in at least two other organizations or programs beyond their BMC participation. As the BMC is a freshman initiative, all of the men participated in the program during their first year at GU and were serving as peer mentors and program staff at the time of the study. Table 5 provides demographic information for each of the case study participants.

Table 5: BMC Student Demographic Information

<b>Student</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>GPA</b>	<b>Engagement</b>
Earl	Black	Strategic Comm.	Sophomore	3.51	2 years
Devin	Black	Business Management	Sophomore	2.93	2 years
Jasper	Black	Economics & Black Studies	Sophomore	2.69	2 years
Jon	Black	Health Science	Sophomore	3.2	2 years
CJ	Black	Nutrition & Fitness	Junior	3.2	3 years
Ty	Black	Business Marketing	Senior	3.2	3 years

Earl, a sophomore Communication major and Business and Sociology minor, had been involved in the BMC both of his years in college. He was a member of three other organizations at GU, including an honors fraternity. During his freshman year, Earl was awarded with a GU distinguished honors award for high scholastic achievement. In the future, he aspires to be a marketing executive. As Earl disclosed, he was raised in a two-parent, upper-middle class family. Both his parents obtained Bachelor’s degrees and his mom completed a Master’s degree. Earl credits his parents and grandparents for his motivation to attend college. As he stated:

I’d say that [college] was a lot about family, for me. Seeing my mom and my dad and my grandparents—all of them going on to college. Seeing my grandparents

get doctorate degrees and them always instilling in me, ‘You need to go to college, especially for you as a black man in the United States—an education can be very beneficial to your life.’ So they instilled in me the value of education and so that's why [I came].

When asked about his student experience at GU, Earl described it as a positive experience of change and development.

Devin, a sophomore Business Management major, had also been involved in the BMC both of his years in college. Beyond the BMC, Devin was engaged in three other GU organizations. During his two years of college, Devin has been honored with three student awards and an academic scholarship. In the future, he aspires to become a sports agent and venture capitalist. Devin’s background includes being raised in a two-parent, upper-middle class home. His parents both obtained Bachelor’s degrees and his mom completed a graduate Master’s degree. Earl credited his family for much of his motivation to attend college, but he also understood the value of a college degree. As he discussed:

For me, I come from a family of educators; my mother and grandmother both went into higher education administrative roles. And then ... most of [my family] went into education, so it wasn't really a [choice] about going to college. That plus wanting to make a change in my community and knowing that I would need a degree to get certain skills and tools needed to do so.

When detailing his student experience at GU, Devin described it as a positive experience that has affirmed and changed him in a number of ways.

Jasper, a sophomore double major in Economics and Black Studies with a Math minor, has been involved in the BMC consistently since his freshman year. At the time of the case study, he was involved in three other organizations or programs at GU, including a scholarship program. To date, Jasper had been awarded with four academic scholarships. He aspires to open a charter school and become a CEO. As Jasper shared, he was raised in a two-parent, middle class family. His father obtained a Master's degree and was an educator, which inspired Jasper to attend college. He mentioned:

For my family, basically, it was expected. My dad was an educator. So, there was no real question of if I was going to college. [Additionally], I've always wanted to own my own business. I wanted to create a major impact on society; I thought that college would be a necessary [way] to do so.

When asked about his student experience at GU, Jasper described it as a unique experience with challenges that he had to overcome.

Jon, a sophomore Health Science major, had also been involved in the BMC since his freshman year. In addition to serving as a BMC Peer Mentor, Devin was involved in two other GU organizations. During his freshman year, Jon made the Dean's List. His future career aspiration is to become a dermatologist. Jon grew up in a two-parent, middle class family. Both of his parents obtained Bachelor's degrees and his mom completed a Master's degree. Jon attributed his motivation to attend college to his parents and observing his mom pursue a graduate education. As he explained, "my parents taught me [about college], and then also seeing my mom get her master's, too, showed me what I needed to do and how to do it." When asked about his student

experience at GU, Jon described it as a positive experience due to the BMC and the two organizations in which he was engaged.

CJ, a senior Nutrition & Fitness major, has been involved in the BMC for three years consistently since his freshman year. In BMC, CJ served as the Program Assistant, which meant that he helped the Program Advisor in coordinating aspects of the program. At the time of the case study, he was involved in two other organizations at GU, including a historically-Black fraternity where he held a leadership position. CJ was awarded a four-year academic scholarship to attend GU. In the future, he aspires to become a strength and conditioning coach and eventually own his own gym. As CJ disclosed, he was raised in a two-parent, middle class family. Both of his parents attended and graduated from college, and his mom also obtained a Master's degree. CJ's parents were a motivating force in his decision to attend college. He recounted:

Basically, growing up [college] was what I was groomed to do; in the sense that it's what you're expected to do—you get through high school, you go on to higher education. Even in high school, I was in a college preparatory program called AVID. And even when I wasn't entirely sure about what I wanted to do or my own motivations for it, that's just what I knew what I was going to do. I was ready to do.

According to CJ, his student experience at GU, thus far, had been a great experience that offered him much more than he could have expected.

Ty, a senior Business Marketing major, had been involved in the BMC for three years. Within the BMC, he served as Teaching Assistant, which meant that he co-taught the program class along with the Program Advisor. In addition to his BMC

responsibility, Ty was engaged in three other GU organizations and programs, including a historically-Black fraternity in which he held a leadership position. During his time in college, Ty has made the Dean's List and received a number of other university awards. After college, Ty mentioned that he would be moving into a job that he accepted prior to the focus group interview. He aspires to become a sales manager and entrepreneur. Ty shared that he raised in a single-parent, middle class home. He noted that he observed his mom obtain a Master's degree, which was his motivation for attending college. As he explained:

I would say my mother was my motivation for attending college. Even from like a kid, she always taught me to dream big. She always told me that, so it inspired me to be an entrepreneur. [In order to do so] I needed to go to college, get my master's, and get my doctorate. When I was in eighth grade and high school, she went back [to college] and got her Master's, so at that point it was like there's no ... excuse for me not to pursue higher education when she's given me the tools needed and the motivation needed to do so.

When reflecting on his experience as a student at GU, Ty characterized it as a positive, enriching experience filled with opportunities he did not foresee when entering college.

As previously stated, all of the men who participated in this case study demonstrated high levels of engagement in the BMC program by holding leadership positions, which required them to serve as peer mentors and attend program meetings, classes, study groups, service projects, and travel opportunities. As a leadership team, these men collectively agreed to participate in this case study based on their engagement, longevity, and familiarity with the BMC program.

## **Case Findings**

Upon analysis of the focus group interview data, the findings of this case-study emerged revealing five primary themes germane to sense of belonging among the student-participants in the BMC initiative: (1) Experiencing Brotherhood; (2) Having a Support System; (3) Gaining Exposure and Accountability; (4) Undergoing Growth and Development; and (5) Boosting Retention. Each of these themes and their effect on students' sense of belonging will be discussed in the following sections. To support each theme, direct quotes from participants are emphasized to illuminate the voices of the Black men in this case study regarding their encounters at GU and in the BMC program. In doing this, the meaning students make of these experiences will be conveyed. As the men in this case-study detailed their student experience at GU, each one of them underscored how the BMC program was positively essential to their college journey. Following the thematic discussion of the focus group interview data, a document analysis will be presented to corroborate the major themes of the case study. The findings from this case study assert that the BMC provided the men with the tools necessary to effectively navigate GU and thrive both academically and socially. Thus, the men's sense of belonging and retention were strengthened.

***Experiencing Brotherhood.*** When asked about their overall student experience at GU, the desire for connecting and building relationships with other Black males was striking among the men in the case study. Some of the men, specifically Jon and Ty, expressed how they longed for friends their first semester at GU. As Jon shared, “especially coming onto a college campus, you're trying to find friends that first semester; you're trying to find your friend group or who to hang with.” Ty added:

...just having friends; having somebody to kick it with. That first year, that first semester, that first couple months you literally don't know anyone. If you don't come here from [high] school with people, then you don't know anyone. [Other students] don't know your personality; you're not guaranteed to know people, but being in BMC, it's an automatic association [among] brothers.

Based on the natural association between participants described here, the BMC was the conduit to connecting and creating friendships among students in the program. For instance, Ty characterized the purpose of the BMC program in the following way:

I would say [BMC] is [about] putting dope, phenomenal Black men at my reach. I had never grown up with a father figure in the home. I didn't have [men] to look up to ... when I got here and saw men all doing different things and all excelling at them, being great at them; people getting their doctorate and masters [degrees] just gave me somebody to talk to, be myself around, and also people to aspire to be like as far as life trajectory. Everybody's path is different, but you can still be great, you can still be dope. I feel like that's one of the best things BMC has given to me. It's something that I want to continue and be able to instill in other men.

From this example, Ty highlighted how the program not only promoted friendships between the BMC students, but it also connected them with other Black men on campus outside of other undergraduate students (i.e. faculty, staff, and graduate students).

As the students reflected on their BMC experience and the relationships established in the program, each of the men centered brotherhood as a key feature of their program experience. For example, Ty exclaimed, “BMC prides itself on brotherhood, and I feel like that has been helpful in a sense of iron sharpening iron.” From Ty’s

account, the brotherhood experienced by these men helped them become better individuals through their relationships with other men in the program. According to some of the men, the brotherhood experienced in the BMC program was achieved by encouraging vulnerability among participants. Devin explained:

I think the emphasis on vulnerability [is most helpful]. Especially with Black men not really having that sense of vulnerability; let alone with other Black men. So, [BMC] encouraging [and] promoting vulnerability brings you together closer than any other friendship.

In the same manner, Jasper revealed:

For me, BMC really helped me become vulnerable. I don't like to open up or talk about my situations, but through BMC and feeling that sense of security, I feel like I can talk about anything and everything that goes on in my life.

Later Devin added:

Since the [cohort] is so big, even with people I don't talk to everyday or I'm not as close with, I still feel like I could call them on the phone or ask them a question about anything or any aspect of my personal life without there being some sort of awkwardness or uncomfortable[ness]....

By promoting vulnerability and brotherhood among participants, the BMC offered an environment which made it easier for them to build friendships in the program than others they may have tried to create outside the program. Additionally, the vulnerability and brotherhood promoted in the BMC helped create a space for Black males to feel comfortable sharing their intimate experiences and parts of their personal life with peers in the program. Lastly, the brotherhood in the BMC created a synergy that united them,

which the men in this study were adamant about maintaining for each incoming cohort. To this point, CJ shared, “the [BMC] energy is good. We want to do everything, like we were saying to support...involvement and the brotherhood aspect.” Consequently, the brotherhood aspect became a point of great pride for them as it was visible to the larger GU community. Ty affirmed this by stating:

...on this campus, people know what [BMC] is so, you automatically start to take pride in those letters. Just being able to say you're a part of BMC, that brings [participants] all closer together. So the brotherhood aspect, I would definitely say [is most impactful].

The men in this case study gave primacy to the brotherhood experienced through the BMC program. The brotherhood described by the men helped boost their college experience in a number of ways; for instance, students detailed how they were able to automatically find and make friends with their BMC peers while connecting with other Black men at GU who were pursuing advanced college degrees. These connections aided in students' social integration to GU. Connecting and building relationships with other Black men was achieved through the BMC encouraging vulnerability and creating synergy among the group. This brotherhood and synergy was far reaching and sensed by the greater GU community, which fostered a sense of pride among the men in the case study. The BMC brotherhood served as the foundation to the support system these men gained at GU.

***Garnering a Support System.*** In tandem with gaining brotherhood and making friends, the men in this case study recounted how the BMC formed a solid support system for them during their time in the BMC program. This support system began forming their

freshman year in the program and followed the students each year thereafter, providing them with an experience reminiscent of a family structure. The men mentioned how they viewed their BMC peers as part of the support system. Jon supported this by stating:

...having everyone around you—you actually get to learn a lot of stuff, especially like people's backgrounds, like things you wouldn't even know just looking at them. I think a lot of us learned from each other, and then we also viewed each other as a support system. So we helped each other...I think that's one of the best things [about BMC].

Based on this family-like support system, the men understood that they had individuals by their side invested in their success as students. As a result, the men embodied being more comfortable and effective at navigating through their college experience.

When asked about the purpose of the BMC, Earl shared:

I would say it provides a support system. That first semester of college, it's real tough. Coming from all different walks of life—you don't really know what to expect, so I feel like BMC just provides that common ground, that support system that you really, really need when you come to college.

Similarly, CJ explained:

It's easy to get lost on a college campus, in general. It's easier, you could say, for African-Americans to get lost. I know for me, when I was in my [cohort], having something [class] that I knew I could consistently go to—first semester, twice a week [and] second semester, once a week—where people were on my side.

People who had similar experiences as me wanted to see me do well—it's a huge game changer!

Jasper further added:

I think that level of support when you are [minoritized] on a large campus [like GU] with students who do not look like you, that do not share a lot of the same beliefs as you—[support] is something that is necessary, not only to grow but just to feel comfortable in a home environment

As these men identified, there are two main reasons why support systems are necessary for Black males: (1) college can be difficult for students, especially Black men at HWIs, and (2) Black males are often minoritized, outnumbered, and underserved on majority White campuses. Therefore, support systems similar to the one created in BMC are critical to establishing and enhancing sense of belonging for Black men at historically White college campuses. These systems of support allowed the men to have a positive student experience as they faced various challenges along their journeys. As Jasper affirmed, “I think having that support system through BMC really has allowed me to still enjoy my student experience here at GU, even though I’ve...had the least desirable last couple of years.”

For Earl, the composition of the support system in BMC mattered more than the actual support received. Earl pointed out:

I think, one of the major things—more than just the support—is how the support is structured. [BMC] is not like an organizational [structure] but it’s like a true family. You could call anybody within the organization—I feel like, at any time of day and get a call back, or if they don't respond, they're going to call as soon as they can to be there for assistance.

Having support structured in a way that was reminiscent of a family gave the men in this case study assurance that they were not isolated in their collegiate experience.

Additionally, the family nature of the BMC support system created a home-away-from-home environment for the men, which can be important at a HWI. As CJ shared, “BMC serves the purpose of taking Black male incoming freshmen at GU and giving them a home or essentially like a home team. That's how I feel about it.” The family and home-like environment established by the support system was manifest through the brotherhood among peers, as well the Program Advisors and staff in the BCC at GU. CJ provided an example of this as he recounted receiving support from a former BMC Program Advisor, Dr. Miles, during his freshman year when he was involved in a car accident. CJ explained:

... right when the [accident] happened, [Dr. Miles] made sure that...I went to the emergency room right after it happened. And then, the next day, he made sure that I was okay and that I was taken care of. [There] were other people around me too to make sure that I was good. I've never been in a more vulnerable position exactly like that.

Having Dr. Miles's care and support during a traumatic time in college meant a great deal to CJ and is something that is engrained in his college experience.

The support system further encouraged and affirmed the men in this case study to embrace vulnerability. In doing so, this liberated the men to be open and comfortable with who they were. As an example of this, Devin explained:

I would say, the number one [most impactful] thing was [providing] reassurance. Considering how pivotal this point is in our lives, BMC just reassures you that

you are who you are, being comfortable being who you are. And whatever you do, try and be the best at it.

As Devin explained, the support system experienced by the men in BMC affirmed them in ways that allowed them to be comfortable in their vulnerability during a critical time in their lives as they were striving for success. Through the support received, students were also encouraged to seek and utilize additional campus resources. Jasper confirmed this by sharing:

[Being vulnerable] allowed me to reach out and find those resources and those people that I can talk to about the situations that I'm going through back home, and how I can deal with those properly while still staying focused on school.

The support system experienced by the men in the BMC was found to be key contributor to their student success and experience at GU. The support system included BMC peers, BMC Program Advisors, Black Cultural Center staff, and other campus services and resources. From the strong support system established for BMC participants, the men in this case study were affirmed in a family environment that felt like home for many students. This support and affirmation was imperative to helping students face and endure hardships, knowing that they were not alone in their experiences. Lastly, the support system motivated students to utilize supplemental campus resources than what they received through BMC, which promoted student success among the men. Similar to brotherhood, the support system experienced by the men in this case study fostered and enhanced their sense of belonging at GU. As students' support system expanded, their exposure to the university and new opportunities expanded as well.

*Gaining Exposure and Opportunities.* For each of the participants in this case study, being involved in the BMC program exposed them to resources and opportunities that the men, otherwise, may not have been privy to. This exposure included both on-campus and off-campus resources and opportunities available to the students. Similar to the support system described by the participants of the case study, the exposure to resources expanded throughout their college journey. According to Earl:

That first semester [in BMC] not only are you provided with the support system, accountability, and the friends, but you're also provided with opportunities for you to branch out and see [GU] as a whole and see how you can develop into a [successful] student here at [GU].

The men identified various resources and opportunities experienced within the BMC that included: tutoring, scholarships, national travel, professional connections, internships, on-campus student jobs, and post-graduation employment, to name a few. For the men, these resources and opportunities were beneficial to their student experience and navigation through GU. As an example, Ty mentioned:

With [BMC], we get exposure to a lot of campus resources here at [GU]. I've had opportunities that I didn't expect to have [such as] job opportunities that have allowed me to stay afloat. [For instance], just knowing how to work my way through financial aid and the different scholarship offerings, I learned because of [BMC]. [Recently, I accepted] a full-time opportunity that's going to allow me to, unfortunately, pay back this debt, but at the same time, I'll be [employed] once I graduate.

To this point, Jon added, “I will also agree with the resources we are exposed to on campus. As part of academics, [we] utilize free tutoring...” Both Ty and Jon identified several resources and opportunities they were exposed to such as jobs, free tutoring, and scholarships.

The exposure to resources and opportunities can be attributed to the support system described by the men as well as the prominence of the BMC throughout the GU campus. Throughout the BMC’s nine-year existence, the program has become an attractive campus staple based on the impact previous students, administrators, and BMC affiliates have made. As a positive result, these efforts gained BMC students clout, favor, and greater opportunities across the campus. Jasper spoke to this point by saying:

It seems like in every single facet of [GU] campus life, there's [representation from someone] who was either in [BMC], connected to [BMC], or really supports the program. No matter what you need or want to do on campus, literally all you have to do is knock on the door, say, ‘I was a part of [BMC]...’ and they say ‘yea, I have this position for you, I can help you meet this person, I can help you get onto the grad[uate school] track if you want to do that.’ So, I think [BMC] is really about how many resources are open to us because so many people have made changes on this campus.

Most importantly, by the examples of exposure to resources and opportunities provided by the men in this case study, they demonstrated ways in which they gained social and cultural capital. Another example of increasing social and cultural capital, would be the annual BMC Spring Break excursion trip to Civil Rights significant destinations that allowed the men to expand their cultural knowledge.

*Undergoing Growth and Development.* Among the narratives of participants in this case study, growth and development was a consistent pattern. Each of the students detailed how the BMC program was a catalyst to their growth. Additionally, all of the men mentioned going through a great deal of change that they could not have imagined undergoing when they entered college. Collectively, the men had perceptions of what they imagined their college experience would be, but none of them imagined undergoing the amount of personal change and development experienced at GU through the BMC. The growth and development experienced within the BMC was tremendous in their college experience and in molding the men into who they are. For example, Earl pointed out, "...but through [BMC], I've met amazing people, done amazing things, and it's really, really changed me for the better. And I think that I'm growing into the person I'm supposed to be." To this notion, CJ shared his perspective on growth and development in BMC in this way:

Everybody in [BMC] is trying to help you become a better version of yourself ... connection, support, development, and involvement--it just makes such a huge difference. As a [former BMC] member--moving through the rest of your college career, [BMC] is a jumpstart.

Adding to CJ's statement, Jon stated:

He just touched on a few [BMC] pillars, which are support, development, and involvement. I think I learned the most important things that I believe not only allow for growth within the Black male freshmen, but it also helps the environment around us because through involvement and doing different activities and events and other people get to see us. And we rub off on different

communities through service. So, I think that, through this program we also better all the communities that we touch.

When discussing the change these men underwent, both CJ and Jon connected their BMC experiences back to the pillars of the program (support, development, and involvement); making this connection reveals the depth of the impact the BMC has on its participants and their sense of belonging.

While discussing the growth and development experienced as a result of being engaged in the BMC, some students mentioned specific skills gained through the program and how those skills influenced their development. Additionally, students noted how people and opportunities they were exposed to through BMC aided in their growth. All of these factors not only greatly contributed to the men's development, but they also increased sense of belonging for these students. As CJ so passionately affirmed:

...for me, personally, I feel like [BMC] is a cornerstone of the development of who I am. Without [BMC], I mean, I wouldn't be where I am ... [BMC] gave me all the jobs, the positions, social status, mentorships, and all this stuff is because of [BMC]...

Devin added:

I think, for me, [BMC] helped me develop a lot of my soft skills and helped me develop a lot of personal skills I didn't have before. Now I relate to people really well, and I connect to people well. That's actually how I ended up getting my residence life job. I [mentioned] being in [BMC], they recognized the name of the organization, and then saw how the skills were transferable actually got me the job.

CJ and Devin's statements add more examples of the increasing social and cultural capital gained by the men in this case study from their BMC involvement. From their accounts, the men gained skills that secured jobs and greater social integration into GU. Greater development, social and cultural capital, and social integration can increase sense of belonging for Black males, which in turn increases retention and persistence among these students.

*Boosting retention.* Among the participants of this case study, retention was at the core of their narratives in relation to outcomes of the BMC program. In their own way, all six of the men credited the BMC for enhancing their GU experience, sense of belonging, and ultimately, persistence; these outcomes were achieved through experiencing brotherhood, a support system, exposure to greater resources and opportunities, and growth and development through the BMC. Without the BMC, as aforementioned, many of the men noted that they were unsure of where they would have been and what their student success would have looked like. Jasper supported this notion by divulging:

I think my student experience...was really, really unique...it has been a loving experience, but these last few years have been some of the most adverse times in my life. Having people that could support me through [BMC]--that's what kept me in school, because I don't think without people from [BMC], I'd still be in school just based off the things that have happened to me the last couple of years.

Jasper's illustration mirrors those of other students in the case study who faced adversity but persisted, nonetheless, based on their BMC experience and the tools the program

provided. For many of the men, the BMC boosted their student experience in ways they could not have imagined when entering the program. Consistent with this, Jon discussed:

I would definitely say I was surprised, because coming from high school, I really didn't know what to expect. I feel like getting involved in ... [BMC] really made my experience because I got to meet new people. These same people you see in class [naturally form] study groups ... so it all ties into academics. I would say that it definitely boosted my experience here [at GU].

Jon's reflection emphasized the class component of the BMC program. As previously stated, the BMC course is a requirement for BMC participants to be enrolled throughout their freshman year in the program.

The BMC course is where the formal learning took place within the program as students gained tips and strategies to help them navigate college and ease their high school to college transition. For the men, the class proved to be instrumental in their BMC experience and preparation for the remainder of college. As Jon explained, students in the BMC program organically formed study groups to promote academic success. In addition, Jon described how the BMC course aligns with and supports the students' academic endeavors. In this way, students were able to contextualize what they were being taught in other courses, while applying the skills learned to retain course material. Jon further shared:

I think that one of the more important things that comes from the class and having everyone around you [is that] you actually get to learn a lot of stuff, especially people's backgrounds and things you wouldn't even know by just looking at them.

[In the class], we learned from each other and about how to [navigate] certain things at [GU]. [BMC] really helps; it also helps your retention rate, too.

In agreement, CJ explained:

I think, one of the neatest things about [BMC] is that it's a system that works. So when you talk to each class [cohort], and they share their stories about what was really impactful about the program, one commonality you see a lot is that in the beginning of the year, the [freshmen] heard from people who were in [BMC] before, 'Oh y'all are gonna get close'... by the end of the year, every [cohort] is close ... even though it is special and unique for each individual class, the fact that it's so similar speaks to my point that it's a system that works.

To CJ's explanation, Devin added, "It's a game changer" referring to the BMC program.

As Devin and CJ pointed out, the BMC program has been successful each year in its efforts to connect, unite, support, and retain its Black male participants. The "system," as CJ referred to, has been evaluated and measured based on student reflections at the end of every academic year.

### **Summary**

Included in this chapter was a detailed description of the site chosen for this case study, the BMC program at GU. I began the chapter by profiling GU, the institution where the program is supported. Next, I outlined various aspects of the BMC program encompassing the history, mission and purpose, structure, and various engagement aspects of the program. I also provided descriptions of the participants in the case study to engender the voices of the students. This also allowed for the self-disclosed student demographic information to be shared. The chapter concluded with presenting the case

study findings. The major findings of this case were based on the five most salient themes that emerged from the focus group interview data: (1) Experiencing Brotherhood, (2) Garnering a Support System; (3) Gaining Exposure to Resources and Opportunities; (4) Undergoing Growth and Development; and (5) Boosting Retention. From these findings we are able to better understand (a) the nature of this particular BMI program, (b) student experiences within the BMI program, and (c) how the BMI fostered sense of belonging among students. These five themes were most pertinent to the conceptual framework of sense of belonging based on student perceptions and narratives. Based on the findings, the BMC program achieved success in its aim to aid in the transition from high school to college for Black male freshmen, while fostering a sense of belonging, promoting academic and social engagement, encouraging self-responsibility, and expressing to students the benefits of higher education.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I present a cross-case analysis of the three BMI programs selected for this study. Each of the selected programs was presented as individual cases in the preceding chapters. When conducting a multi-case study, it is customary for a cross-case analysis to be conducted after each single case has been presented (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014; Stake, 2006, Yin, 2014). The purpose of offering a cross-case analysis is to examine similarities and differences across all of the single cases . Additionally, this allows us to understand how these programs collectively impacted the student experiences and sense of belonging of the men in this study. While the analysis highlights certain differences among the programs, the primary purpose is to: 1) compare and contrast similarities and differences among the BMI programs; 2) offer an explanation of variations among the programs; and 3) understand the unique findings of each program. By doing this, key program features that promote Black male student success and sense of belonging across the three programs are revealed. Each of the three programs exhibited a level of success in achieving their mission to create spaces for Black males that promote student achievement and increased persistence. Thus, this chapter conveys the ways in which the men in this case study were supported and engaging within the selected BMI programs. In this chapter, I draw specifically from the data; in the next chapter, I will connect these findings to extant literature.

#### **Major Findings**

The current study presented several themes that emerged from the focus group data. Initially, these themes were presented in individual cases. However, for the

purposes of this cross-case analysis, these themes were further analyzed based on their commonalities and differences. Altogether, these themes will be re-discussed in this chapter to provide an understanding of how the three BMI programs selected for this study impact the college experiences of their participants. Table 6 offers a visual representation of the individual themes identified within each program and provides the foundation for the cross-case analysis.

Table 6. Single Case Themes

Single Case Themes		
<i>Case One: BMN Themes</i>	<i>Case Two: BML Themes</i>	<i>Case Three: BMC Themes</i>
Connecting & Retaining Black Males	Experiencing the Benefits of Brotherhood	Experiencing Brotherhood
Providing Educational & Transformative Experiences	Acquiring Skills to Navigate College	Having a Support System
Creating a Consistent Safe-Zone	Undergoing Growth & Development	Gaining Exposure to Resources & Opportunities
		Undergoing Growth & Development
		Boosting Retention

For the purposes of this cross-case analysis, I analyzed the major themes that emerged in each of the single cases and categorized them across all three cases to pinpoint any patterns or *meta codes* or themes (Saldaña, 2016). To do this I utilized pattern coding, which involved applying a category label to similarly coded data (Saldaña, 2016). Table 7 depicts the meta codes that emerged in relation to the larger multi-case study presented here. The table indicates to which programs these mega themes were present.

Table 7. Prominent Cross-Case Themes

<i>MAJOR CASE THEMES</i>	<i>BMN</i>	<i>BML</i>	<i>BMC</i>
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CONNECTING BLACK MALES & CREATING BROTHERHOOD	X	X	X
PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT	X	X	X
ACQUIRING SUPPORT & SKILLS TO NAVIGATE COLLEGE		X	X
BOOSTING PERSISTENCE	X		X
CREATING A SAFE-ZONE	X		

***Connecting Black Males and Creating Brotherhood.*** Across all three of the cases presented in this study, being connected to Black males and experiencing brotherhood was consistently present in the BMI programs. Brotherhood was at the core of the men’s narratives concerning their BMI involvement, and for them, the programs were the conduit to experiencing brotherhood. For these men, brotherhood involved camaraderie and synergy that developed as a result of the peer relationships among program participants. When entering college, these men desired to be connected with other Black males who shared similar racial identity, experiences, and backgrounds; this is not surprising given that they all attended HWIs. Based on the natural association provided through the BMI programs, the students in this study mentioned how they were able to organically create friendships with other men in the program. Particularly for students in the BMC program, they shared how they were also able to build a strong bond of brotherhood with the Program Advisors, who were also Black men. This was not as prevalent in the other two programs based on the student narratives in the BMN and BML.

As many of the men shared, they felt outnumbered on their campuses and racially isolated, particularly in classrooms where they were often one of a few Black students among a plethora of White students. In addition to being outnumbered and racially isolated, the men noted that they faced obstacles in college such as rough high school-to-

college transitions, culture shock, struggling academically and socially, and unwelcoming campus environments. Although the men in this study highlighted these obstacles and challenges as part of their student experiences, they all credited the BMI program on their campus to helping them overcome and cope with these challenges. The students in the BMN and BML programs further illustrated how they faced negative stereotypes and deficit notions that they were not capable of excelling as students both on their campus and in society. Accordingly, these men's desire to be connected with other young Black men grew deeper as they aspired to unite together in proving to the masses that they were, indeed, capable of excelling and meeting their educational goals. Therefore, the brotherhood experienced by the men became instrumental to their individual and collective success.

The brotherhood and peer relationships developed among the men were also integral to their social integration on each of their campuses. Specifically, for the men in the BML and BMC programs, being connected to Black men and experiencing brotherhood increased their perceived sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). The men in these two case studies explicitly mentioned sense of belonging and connection when recounting their BMI experiences. Although the men in the BML case study did not explicitly name sense of belonging when describing their BMI experiences, their accounts indicated that the BML created a space for them to feel connected to one another and their respective institution. Based on students' perceptions, the BMI programs were successful in connecting and uniting Black males through brotherhood on each of the campuses. Among the men within each case and across all three cases, there were differences in their backgrounds. Some of the men grew up in upper middle-class

areas where they attended predominately White schools, while others grew up in lower income areas and were limited to predominately Black, lower resourced schools. Regardless of students' background, each of the BMIs were able to unite and build community for these young Black men. For the students in the BMC program, brotherhood was uniquely developed within one year and cultivated through the required class component of the program. For the men in the BMN and BML, brotherhood was developed over a longer span of time through the social aspects of the programs (i.e. serving in leadership, attending meetings, Barbershop Talks, game nights, and intramurals).

*Providing Opportunities for Growth and Development.* In all three cases, growth and development was also a recurring theme. Students in each case illustrated how they had undergone personal growth and development throughout their engagement in the BMI program on their campus. For example, many of the men provided specific accounts of how they had grown from naïve freshmen who were not focused or passionate about college to becoming well-informed, responsible students who valued their college experience. Their narratives conveyed how they noticed change within themselves and one another. Across all three cases, the men mentioned and demonstrated how the BMI programs encouraged them to become vulnerable and be comfortable in their vulnerability, which the men believed was important to yielding personal change. The growth and development experienced by the men in this study was also fostered by educational and transformative features of the BMI programs, such as Barbershop Talks (BMN and BML), Black Male Think Tanks (BMN and BML), required courses (BMC), and travel opportunities (BML and BMC). In addition, the men in all three cases credited

part of their growth and development to the formal and informal mentoring aspects of the BMI programs. These mentoring opportunities stemmed from the brotherhood they experienced in the BMI programs and allowed the men to share with one another advice and strategies for succeeding and navigating college effectively. The advice and strategies shared with the men boosted the men's cultural capital in addition to promoting their development as students. For the men in the BMN and BML programs, their narratives highlighted how they were developed as leaders through serving as peer mentors and coordinating events and aspects of the BMI in which they were engaged. The men in these two cases also noted that having younger BMI participants view them as role models motivated them to seek opportunities to sharpen their leadership skills and development.

Several of the men across all three cases connected their development to the mission and purpose of the BMI program on their campus. In Case Three, the BMC participants specifically mentioned the pillars of the program when illustrating the growth and development they underwent. In doing this, students in each of the programs exhibited awareness of and deep connectivity to the BMI programs. Time and time again, the students in the study conveyed how their mindsets and perspectives were positively altered as they learned how to negotiate college, giving them a new outlook on their overall student experience. Based on their positive perceptions of the growth they experienced within the three BMI programs, it became apparent to the men that they should in turn make an impact on others on their campuses and greater community. In addition, men across all three cases revealed how they could not have imagined undergoing as much change as they had experienced when entering college. As the men

recounted their college experience, they described how personal growth and development experienced in these BMI programs was instrumental to who they had become at the time of the study. To this end, the students expressed their zeal for ensuring that the legacy and longevity of the BMI programs would be intact for future classes of incoming Black male undergraduate students. As the men saw it, their BMI experiences were essential to Black male success, both in college and life thereafter.

*Being Exposed to Resources and Support.* By in large, students in the BML and BMC shared how they were exposed to resources and support as members of these two programs. Although this theme was not as prevalent in the focus group data from the BMN program in regard to being exposed to resources, peer support from brotherhood was exhibited amongst the men. Within all three programs, the students demonstrated that they were able to support one another through various experiences along their college journey, such as accessing resources, coping, and strategizing how to negotiate college. For many of the men, the support gained through the bond of brotherhood became their basic support system. As an example, multiple students conveyed how they were able to share with one another advice and strategies for succeeding and navigating college effectively, which enhanced the men's cultural capital. Through peer support, the men noted how they began motivating and holding one another accountable academically, and by doing this, student success was strongly encouraged among the men. The students in the BMC program highlighted how they garnered a support system beyond their peers in the program that consisted of Program Advisors and other Black professionals at their campus. The BMC students detailed how their support system resembled that of familial support that affirmed them and their value as Black men.

Surprisingly, students in the BMN and BML did not mention their Program Advisors or other campus leaders when describing the support they received, which presents an opportunity to evaluate and increase support from Program Advisors and other stakeholders. Students in both the BMN and BMC programs understood and expressed the need of support for Black males at HWIs as they encounter challenges such as being minoritized and faced with gendered racism. The support garnered through these two BMI programs ensured the men that they were not alone in their college journey, thus increasing their sense of belonging on their campuses.

As a result of their BMI participation and the network of support experienced by the BMC students, these men discussed how they were exposed to additional resources and support off-campus including professional connections, job opportunities, and non-university, community mentors. To that end, students in the BMC illustrated a desire for additional support beyond the university to a greater extent than students in the BMN and BML programs. These men mentioned how they longed for greater engagement with alumni. From the support received by the men in the BML and BMC programs, the men in these cases expressed how they gained certain skills, knowledge, and strategies, which helped them navigate their college career more productively and effectively. These skills ranged from better time management to financial aid literacy. Additionally, students identified how they learned helpful strategies to approaching and building relationships with their professors such as going to office hours and seeking help from professors early each semester. According to students, the skills, knowledge, and strategies gained through the support derived from the BMI program on their campus enhanced their feelings of sense of belonging and connection to their institution. As the men gained

knowledge and skills to navigate college, they were able to share these things with incoming Black male students. Sharing advice and experiential knowledge with younger participants brought gratification for many of the upper-classmen in this study.

***Boosting Persistence.*** As previously mentioned in each of the cases, all of the BMI programs in this study aimed to ultimately increase retention of the Black male collegians on their campus. However, while retention was a common theme among all three programs purposes and mission statements, this theme was only salient among two of the programs—the BMN and BMC. Several of the men revealed how these two programs directly promoted persistence of students as a result of their involvement. According to the men, persistence was supported through the brotherhood, motivation, accountability, support, development, and exposure to resources encountered in the BMI programs. As students acquired navigational skills, they demonstrated how the programs enhanced their resilience and persistence.

While retention was not a salient theme in the BML case study and program, the men in this particular case study did point to program outcomes that could result in greater retention of students. For instance, they noted increases in their motivation, sense of accountability, self-responsibility, and development. This finding presents an opportunity for the BML to place greater emphasis on retention and persistence, while being intentional about strengthening existing efforts or incorporating new efforts that have been found to boost persistence such as a formal mentor and faculty interaction (Strayhorn, 2012). In addition, this finding uncovers an opportunity to examine any records or data on retention of the students in the BML program. Furthermore, while retention and persistence were not prevalent in the narratives of the BML students, this is

not the sole indication or representation of retention rates among the participants in this program.

*Creating a Safe Haven.* Among the collective themes presented from all three cases, this theme was only prominent in the BMN program. Perhaps, a few explanations for this would be the campus environment, presence of racism, small Black student population, and an even smaller Black male population. As the students in the BMN program detailed their student experiences, racism, culture shock, and being outnumbered were consistent among participant narratives. These students noted experiencing micro-aggressions in academic and social spaces, while being treated as illegitimate members of the institution (see Smith et al. 2007, 2011). The men chronicled how the BMN created a safe haven to which Black males could escape the aforementioned racialized encounters on campus. The safety encountered within the BMN proved to be integral for the students in the program. Reports from students in the BMN reiterated how the program established a safe, judge-free space for Black men at SMU to speak freely and openly about issues impacting them. According to the BMN students, the Barbershop Talks were the catalyst for creating this safe haven. Through the Barbershop Talks, the men were able to openly discuss and contextualize what it means to be a Black man in the U.S. and on a historically White college campus. From the narratives of students, the opportunity to discuss the plight of the Black man in relation to the current political landscape of anti-intellectualism and police killings of unarmed Black men proved to be beneficial.

While this notion of a safe haven was not a prominent theme that emerged from the student narratives within the BML and BMC programs, a few students in both

programs did, in fact, highlight how the two programs created a space where they were free to discuss issues facing them as Black men on their respective campuses. Several factors could explain the differences in how students identified the safe space the BMIs provided on each campus. As each of these campuses were located in different geographic locations, the overall campus climate and presence of racism and hostile environments for Black males could have varied. For instance, when comparing the overall student experiences shared by the men in this study, the students at GU did not largely name racism as a part of their student experience. Thus, the students' need for a safe space at GU did not seem to be as great as students at SMU and HU who overwhelmingly identified racism as a common pattern in their student experiences. Additionally, the men at SMU and HU could have been provided with other safe spaces outside of the BMI program on their campus. Additionally, Other organizations, the cohesiveness of the Black campus community, and the cultural centers where these programs were housed could have also impacted students' need for a safe space. Fortunately, for any student needing a safe space, all three of the BMI programs offered a level of safety and comfort for students.

### **Common Program Features**

Although it was not the original intent of this study, the data analysis and findings in this research highlighted key program features that were common among the BMI programs included in this multi-case study. Therefore, in this section I offer my findings to add to and connect with what this study has already revealed. These program features are important and have implications for BMI program structures across the U.S.

***Class & Barbershop Talks.*** Across all three cases, having a space to speak openly about issues impacting Black men and learning strategies to overcome the issues on college campuses was essential to the experiences of the men in this study. More specifically, being able to discuss and contextualize what it means to be both Black and male in the U.S. and at a HWI was salient for the men in each case. After examining the documents provided by all three programs, the BMN and BML programs mentioned Barbershop Talks as the program feature that allowed students to engage in this form of dialogue and acquire navigational skills, which corroborated the accounts provided by BMN students. The men in the BML did not specifically name Barbershop Talks as a mode of engagement that influenced their program experience and allowed them to engage in critical dialogue concerning the plight of Black men, which could mean that students were engaged in these conversations through other program events. Program documents for the BMC identified the required freshman class as being the space that students could learn college navigational skills and engage in challenges facing Black men, and this point aligned with student narratives provided concerning the class. According to students, the BMN Barbershop Talks and BMC required class allowed them to feel like they mattered, which assisted in their sense of belonging. Additionally, these program features expanded the students' personal development and cultural capital. The men in these two programs connected the class and Barbershop Talks with experiencing brotherhood, peer camaraderie, and enhancing their sense of belonging to their university.

***Peer Mentors.*** When examining all three cases, peer mentoring was a common program feature. All of the men in this study, regardless of which case, underscored ways in which they were engaged in peer mentor relationships. In fact, all of the

participants with the exception of one student served as peer mentors in their respective BMI programs. Information gathered from the program documents substantiated this finding. These relationships were centered around brotherhood and sharing of knowledge and skills for navigating college from upper-classmen (seniors, juniors, and in some cases sophomores) to under-classmen (freshmen and in some cases sophomores). For the men serving as a peer mentors, this role brought gratification, partly due to the fact that they could see their impact on other students. This also motivated the men to strive at becoming greater role models and leaders, which cultivated their leadership development. The men in this study collectively detailed positive outcomes of peer mentor relationships such as accountability, support, personal growth and development, leadership development, gaining new skills, and learning how to navigate college. Based on these outcomes, the men in the study discerned increases in their sense of belonging and likelihood to persist through college. It is important to note that the BMN and BMC programs each have formal peer mentor programs, while the BML program has a more informal approach to mentoring. One reason for this variance may be the autonomy programs seek to maintain for their participants. Students in the BML expressed appreciation for a less formal approach to mentoring.

*Campus Resources and Services.* Upon examination of each case, it was revealed that all three programs connected students to additional campus resources and services beyond the BMI program such as tutoring, academic advising, career planning, and student success programming. Students reported that some of these services and resources were integrated or reinforced in the BMI program. For instance, the BML program provides academic coaching for students that reinforces the academic advising

they receive in their academic departments and programs. Students in all three programs indicated that tutoring was provided through the BMI on their campus. These efforts to connect students with campus resources and services can aid in fostering student success and sense of belonging as students are able to increase their familiarity and connection to the university. Additionally, these efforts allow students to expand their support network in college—further promoting their student success and sense of belonging. In these ways, student success and retention are promoted among the Black males who are involved in the BMIs.

*Theory to Practice.* Among all three cases, exploration of the data revealed that each of the BMIs in this study incorporated theory into their programs prior to this study being conducted. In addition, these theories showed up in student narratives provided as the basis of this study. An initial review of program documents identified the theoretical framework employed by each program. For the BML, program documents revealed that the program was established using Harper's (2009a, 2010) anti-deficit framework. BML student narratives aligned with this as they described the importance of disproving negative stereotypes that have been projected onto Black males in higher education and wanting to be examples of success for other Black men. Both the BML and BMC programs named sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) in their program documents. More specifically, both the BMN and BMC explicitly integrated sense of belonging in their purpose and mission statements. During the focus groups, the students in both of these programs mentioned sense of belonging in their narratives about the impact of their BMI experience in relation to their college journey. As evidenced by student accounts, the men within all three programs demonstrated an understanding and personal

connection with the frameworks as they tied them to their BMI experience. The ways in which these BMIs utilized theory to inform their approach to Black male student success explains why elements of these theories were prevalent as students recounted their BMI engagement. As the review of literature highlighted, these theoretical frameworks have been associated with the educational experiences of Black males, so these frameworks are appropriate and relevant for these BMI programs. This finding indicates that the BMI staff or decision-making stakeholders in each of these programs, either current or past, understood the importance of using theory to drive practice. Moreover, indicates that these programs have been intentional and serious about enhancing Black male success, retention, and graduation on their college campuses.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the cross-case analysis of the three BMI programs selected for this multi-case study. The purpose of offering the cross-case analysis was to compare the similarities and differences across the three cases. Upon collective examination of the three cases and the major findings in each, I combined and re-categorized the themes into meta-themes based on existing patterns among them. The meta-themes of this multi-case study included: 1) Connecting Black Males and Creating Brotherhood; 2) Providing Opportunities for Growth and Development; 3) Acquiring Support and Skills to Navigate College; 4) Boosting Persistence; and 5) Creating a Safe Haven. Each of these meta-themes, their presence in each of the cases, and participants' perceptions of their impact on student experiences was discussed drawing solely from the data in this study. All of the meta-themes that emerged in this analysis assisted in promoting student success and sense of belonging for the men in this study, while creating positive experiences for them.

Any variance in these themes by case was discussed in efforts to provide a deeper understanding of these BMI programs and their uniqueness. This analysis revealed key program features that promoted Black male student success and sense of belonging across the three programs consisting of: 1) Barbershop Talks and the BMC class, 2) peer mentors, 3) campus resources and services, and 4) theory to practice. Based on the collective findings of this analysis, each of the three programs exhibited a level of success in achieving their mission to create spaces for Black males that promoted student achievement and persistence. In the next chapter, I will connect these findings to prior research.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which BMI programs impact the educational experiences of Black male collegians at HWIs. To achieve this purpose, I centered the voices of the men who participated in the study from a CRT (see Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Matsuda, et al, 1993; Solórzano et al. 2001) and anti-deficit (Harper 2009a, 2010; 2012) perspective. Relying on a multi-case study approach, this study sought to answer the following research question: How and in what ways do BMIs impact student experiences at three HWIs? The data sources for this study included focus group interviews and document analysis. I analyzed the data from each program and presented each BMI as a single case. Then I compared analyses across all three cases to illuminate how the three programs influence sense of belonging among the participants of this study. This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the findings. In addition, the chapter addresses implications for our understanding of BMI programs in a larger context. Suggestions for future research are presented, as well as a conclusion for the study.

#### **Discussion**

With any study, it is essential for researchers to discuss the results of an investigation in terms of validity and reliability. The results of the current study met standards of validity and reliability by presenting multiple forms of data (focus groups and document review) and following a replication logic, which means that each BMI program was analyzed and treated as a stand-alone, bounded case. It is also important for researchers to discuss their findings in relation to extant literature. Thus, the following discussion is offered.

When describing their college experiences, several participants in the study discussed encountering challenges of culture shock (Smith et al. 2016), being outnumbered (Davis, 1994; Palmer et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2010), feeling racially isolated (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2013), encountering micro-aggressions (Smith et al. 2007, 2011; Solórzano et al. 2000), and in some cases, being characterized as student-athletes (Smith, et al., 2007; Solórzano, 2000), all while balancing academic and social involvement (Harper, 2009). Based on these experiences, students described a number of ways in which they felt participating in a BMI program enhanced and balanced their student experience. In particular, participants in this study highlighted how these programs fostered a sense of belonging for them on their respective campuses.

According to the men in this study, the BMIs created a safe space for them to connect with other Black males from similar backgrounds and experiences. These spaces allowed the men to be able to a) discuss issues impacting them, b) gain perspective on what it means to be a Black man in the U.S. and at historically-White campus, and c) make-meaning of their experiences. Yosso et al. (2000) argued that environments similar to the ones described by the men in this study “serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (p.252). Safe spaces become important at HWIs, where Black students often face unwelcoming, hostile environments (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Dancy, Edwards, & Davis, 2018; Palmer et al. 2014; Smith et al. 2007, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008). These spaces allowed the men to expand their cultural familiarity and culturally relevant knowledge, which Museus (2014) argued can increase students’ sense of

belonging. Druery and Brooms (in press) also discovered that these authentic, safe spaces can promote persistence among Black male collegians.

Through the connections established in the BMIs, the men were able to build relationships with other BMI participants that allowed them to experience brotherhood within each program. Brooms (2017) defined brotherhood as a shared, connected sense of identity that creates community amongst Black men. Further, Jackson (2012) contended that the notion of brotherhood can be employed to unite a group of men who share a marginalized status on a college campus. Supporting the findings of Barker and Avery (2012), it was important for the men in this study to be connected and united with other like-minded, Black males, who embodied the same drive for success. Further, the men in this study detailed ways that the BMI programs united them in achieving their educational goals, which Jackson (2012) found to be a benefit of brotherhood. For the students, it was important for them to band together and disprove deficit notions of Black male underachievement, which they had experienced on their campuses. By banding together, the men exhibited collectivist orientations toward student success (Druery & Brooms, in press; Museus, 2014) and increased sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) as they constructed counter-narratives of Black male collegians (Brooms, 2016). These collectivist orientations allowed the men to feel as if they were not alone in their college journey, which is consistent with previous research on student experiences in BMIs. For example, Brooms (2016) found that BMI programs can offer students a space to create bonds and community that allows students not to feel alone in their college journey. Experiencing brotherhood, collectivist orientations toward student success, and not feeling alone helped to bolster the men's sense of belonging and persistence efforts.

Experiencing brotherhood also allowed these men to feel valued and included on their respective campuses. In addition to experiencing brotherhood, the men described how they were positively embraced and affirmed as Black men within these BMI programs. In turn, the students appeared to embrace being Black men on historically White campuses with a sense of pride and belonging. This finding is consistent with prior research that suggested culturally affirming environments allow Black students to be validated in their “Blackness” (Harper & Qauye, 2007; Museus, 2008). Based on the what the men shared, these BMI programs helped them to cope with and tolerate the racialized encounters they experienced at their particular institution.

Within these BMI programs, the men were able to find support, which proved to be instrumental to their student experience. Initially, the men encountered peer-to-peer support in the BMI programs. Several researchers have identified the importance of peer support for Black male collegians (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Druery & Brooms, in press; Harper, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008). Students in this study recounted how they held each other accountable and were simultaneously motivated through these peer relationships, which is consistent with McGowan (2016) who discovered that as Black male collegians formed relationships with one another, they made deliberate attempts to assist one another advance toward degree completion. Additionally, through these peer relationships the men were able to share and learn helpful strategies for succeeding in and navigating college. As an example, several of the men expressed how they learned strategies from other students to employ in efforts to build relationships with faculty. Being able to build positive relationships with faculty increased students’ sense of belonging and connection to their respective institution.

These faculty relationships were imperative to increasing student retention and success among Black male collegians (Barker & Avery, 2012; Bonner, 2001; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Fischer, 2007; Fries-Britt, 2001; Gasman et al., 2017; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Palmer et al., 2010). Students in the study also found support in the BMI Program Advisors who assisted the men during tough, adverse times faced throughout their college journey and served as role models for the men in the study. The role that BMI Program Advisors played for students is consistent with Brooms et al.'s (2015) finding that contact with role models in BMI programs can assist students in coping with challenges faced in college. The men in this study paralleled the support received through the BMI programs to familial support—characterizing the BMI as a “home away from home” similar to participants in Brooms’ (2016) study.

In addition to experiencing brotherhood and receiving support, the men also pointed out that they the BMIs exposed them to a variety of campus resources ranging from tutoring to student success programs that supported their academic success and perceived sense of belonging. These campus resources helped the men garner skills such as time management skills, financial aid literacy, and other strategies that reinforced the men’s college navigational ability. This supports prior research that underscored how BMI programs connect students to additional resources that aid in negotiating college campuses (Barker & Avery, 2012). Being exposed to campus resources promoted academic success, sense of belonging, and persistence among the students in the study. The support and resources described by these men increased their social and cultural capital (see Brooms, 2016; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Building social and cultural capital similar to the aforementioned skills students mentioned can

increase sense of belonging among Black male collegians, while helping them navigate college and persist toward graduation (Brooms et al. 2015; Druery & Brooms, in press).

Through the BMI programs, the men in this study demonstrated ways in which they believed their personal growth and development were enhanced through the educational and transformative features of the BMI programs such as Barbershop Talks, Black Male Think Tanks, a supplemental course, and mentoring. Harper and Quayle (2012) advocated that providing Black male collegians with enriching scholastic experiences can yield powerful opportunities for learning and personal growth. According to the men, these experiences were beneficial to their sense of belonging, academic success, and persistence. The men connected their development to the mission, purpose, or principles of the BMI program on their campus, which exhibited the men's awareness of and deep connectivity to the BMI programs. The men identified how the growth and development they experienced was unimaginable prior to and upon entering college. Put another way, the amount of change experienced by these men was remarkable as they reminisced back to their freshmen year. Although the men did not foresee undergoing the amount of personal change as a result of being engaged in a BMI program, they understood how their development was critical to who they were at the time of the study. The students affirmed how their mindsets and views were positively influenced throughout their BMI participation, which allowed students to become more reflective. Similar to the participants in Zell's (2011) study, the personal growth and development highlighted by the men in this study appeared to be based on their BMI involvement. In turn, students were able to foster internal self-awareness and understanding. Bridges (2011) advised that developing self-awareness and self-

understanding are imperative for Black males at HWIs. This awareness and understanding influenced how the men seemed to approach their academic success and recognize their social positioning within larger societal phenomena in the U.S, which supports findings in Palmer et al's. (2013) study that indicated a BMI program had a positive influence on students' approach to their academic pursuit.

Based on their BMI experiences, the men revealed how they believed the BMI programs cultivated their sense of belonging and persistence. Many of the men felt as though they may not have progressed and remained enrolled in college without being involved in the BMI programs. Overwhelmingly, the men in these three programs described their BMI experience as transformative and enriching based on the brotherhood, motivation, accountability, support, development, and exposure to resources and educational opportunities, which promoted increased sense of belonging and persistence. Several scholars have highlighted the importance and positive outcomes of ushering persistence among Black male collegians, which is crucial to their overall success (Cuyjet, 2006, Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms et al., 2015; Flowers, 2004; Harper, 2012, 2014; Strayhorn, 2008, 2010). Due to the impact of these BMI programs, the men in the study developed a desire to impact other Black males, their campuses, and the greater community, which Museus (2014) described as cultural community service. Thus, the BMI programs appeared to provide the men in this study with the skills, resources, and tools to give back to and positively enact change in their communities. As a result, the men were adamant about ensuring that these BMI programs would remain in place for other students to experience. As the men saw it,

their BMI experiences were essential to their student success, both in college and life thereafter.

### **Limitations of the study**

As all studies have weaknesses, the current study had a few limitations that emerged. As the researcher, I aimed to reduce the number of weaknesses as much as possible. Although this investigation was a multi-case study, the qualitative nature of the research limits its generalizability. Therefore, the results of the study may not represent or be generalized to all existing BMI and similar type programs. The fact that this study only explored BMI programs at three HWIs, the findings may not be applicable to similar programs across institutional types such as HBCUs, community colleges, and Hispanic Serving Institutions. In addition, this study examined the experiences of 15 students engaged in BMI, which is a small subpopulation of the total Black male collegian population who participate in these programs. Further, the selection criteria employed in the study to ensure a level of BMI engagement and longevity resulted in all of the study participants being sophomores, juniors, or seniors who were highly engaged in the programs. To this end, the voices of the men in this study do not represent freshmen engaged in these programs or men who may have low engagement in these programs. Moreover, the narratives of the men in this study do not represent all Black male collegians enrolled at HWIs and at institutions across the U.S.

Based on the timeline set for this study and changes that arose at one site, additional limitations emerged. At the onset of the study, I planned to conduct observations at each site. However, based on the availability of the participants and a scheduling conflict at one of the sites, I was not able to conduct an observation of a

program event. With observation data missing for one of the sites, I chose to eliminate all observation data for the other two sites for consistency purposes. Observational data would have provided another form of data to corroborate and further triangulate the findings of this study.

Another limitation of this study was the absence of the BMI Program Advisors' voices. After collecting and analyzing the data used in this study, there were several questions that arose. These questions revealed a few points of clarity that were needed to better explain some of the findings in the study. For instance, the program documents provided for each BMI uncovered a student organization component of each program at some point in their history, but the reasoning behind this was not clear. It is my belief that capturing the narratives of program advisors would have provided pertinent insights into some of the questions that arose, which could have strengthened the findings of the current study.

### **Implications for Practice and Future Research**

The findings of this study proffer several implications for practice and future research in higher education. With regard to practice, my findings underscore the potential BMI programs have in supporting and engaging Black male collegians at HWIs. More specifically, this study demonstrates the ways in which these three BMI programs stimulated peer connections and brotherhood, sense of belonging, student success, and ultimately, persistence among the Black men who participated in this study. The structures and common program features that engaged students in the three BMIs offer a foundation for institutions seeking to create similar programs or build upon current practices. For the students in this study, Barbershop Talks and the supplemental BMI

course in one of the programs seemed to have the most impact on student experiences. The Barbershop Talks and BMI course provided students with opportunities to: 1) openly discuss challenges they faced; 2) learn and share advice for overcoming these challenges and maneuvering college successfully; 3) acquire skills that broadened the men's social and cultural capital; 4) experience personal growth and leadership development; and 5) explore the plight of Black men in larger social contexts. Consistent with existing literature, the Barbershop Talks and the supplemental required BMI course provided students with consistent, frequent contact with program advisors that established a regular routine and promoted sense of belonging (Brooks et al., 2013). The mentoring, support, and exposure to additional resources the men received through their BMI involvement also seemed to be beneficial to their student experiences. Connecting students to mentor support and additional resources that the many not have experienced otherwise can assist students in negotiating college (Barker & Avery, 2012, Brooms et al., 2015; Zell, 2011).

Employing theory to inform practice appeared to be central in each of the programs in this study. Across all three programs, theory was consistently incorporated or used to guide the BMI mission statements, goals, and even implementation of the programs, which furthers prior research that advocated for BMI programs being grounded in research on Black male collegians that support retention and persistence (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Palmer et al., 2013). Through their narratives, the men in the study demonstrated knowledge of the theoretical framework employed within the BMI program on their campus. Also central to each of these BMI programs was the use of student voices in coordinating and implementing aspects of the programs. For instance, each of the programs relied on student leaders to help the program advisor carry out the mission,

purpose, and goals of the BMI. Given that Harper & Kuykendall (2012) called for programs to intentionally involve Black males as collaborators and knowledge experts in the creation, execution, and evaluation of Black male-centered initiatives, it is important for students to be heard, involved, and empowered beyond the peer support they provide within BMIs.

Additionally, some of the men in the study attributed their positive BMI experience to the program advisors who helped them traverse through hardships, which indicates that program advisors can play a pivotal role in student success and encourage persistence through college. St. Léger (2011) asserted that professionals who were tasked with providing advising BMIs have an essential role in the overall success of Black male collegians. Further, Palmer et al. (2013) argued that program advisors' passion and commitment influenced students' motivation for academic excellence. Therefore, it is important for program advisors to embody certain qualities that allow them to be relatable, trustworthy, committed role models for students.

In addition to the implications for practice, the findings of this study also identify implications for future research. As BMI programs continue to be fairly new to college campuses, more research on these programs is needed. Future research should investigate these programs at HWIs employing quantitative approaches as a majority of current research on BMIs is qualitative. This approach will allow us to explore retention rates within BMI programs, as well as retention and graduation rates of students engaged in these programs compared to students who have not been engaged in these programs. Also, future research could explore BMI-type programs at HBCUs and community colleges, which are institution types that enroll a substantial number of Black male

collegians; in doing so, we will be able to determine similarities and differences in BMI programs across various institution types. Further, researchers may uncover a broader spectrum of key program features influencing Black male sense of belonging and student success. With a similar emergence of racial, gender-specific retention programs for Black women in college, future research should capture the voices and perceptions of women who are engaged in these programs. This area of research would allow us to investigate and compare the impact of retention programs for Black students, collectively. The findings from this study reveal that future research should capture the voices of the Program Advisors who provide support, mentorship, and oversight to BMIs. Exploring the insight, experiences, and perceptions of BMI staff will help us better understand BMIs and potentially gain more insight into the institutional backing of these programs. Additionally, these narratives from Program Advisors will reveal what these men gain from their leadership and the meanings they make of serving and supporting Black male collegians.

## **Conclusion**

This multi-case study presents an extensive investigation into the experiences and perceptions of 15 Black male collegians concerning their involvement in BMI programs at three different HWIs. I commenced the study by asking: How and in what ways do BMIs impact college student experiences? To answer this question, I employed the conceptual framework of sense of belonging at the outset of the study given the experiences Black males tend to face at HWIs (Tovar & Simpson, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). Once the sites were selected for the study, program documents were collected and focus groups were conducted at each university. The documents provided pertinent

information to construct in-depth, bounded cases on each program, while data from the focus group offered rich descriptions of student experiences within and perceptions of the BMI programs. Each bounded case offered insight into the impact of each BMI program on students' sense of belonging, student success, and retention as themes emerged through data analysis. While themes differed among the three cases, each of the BMI programs proved to be successful in their mission and goal to provide environments that promoted the student success and persistence among the participants in this study. Furthermore, these BMI programs served a critical role in the collegiate experiences of the men in this study.

Five themes emerged from the cross-case analysis that combined all of the themes presented in the single cases. These themes encompassed: 1) Connecting Black Males and Creating Brotherhood, 2) Providing Opportunities for Growth and Development, 3) Acquiring Support and Skills to Navigate College, 4) Boosting Persistence, and 5) Creating a Safe Haven. Being connecting to other Black males was important for the men in this study, and the three BMI programs provided a safe space for the men to encounter and build brotherhood with other participants. As the men encountered brotherhood and established relationships among other participants, they also experienced peer support that boosted their BMI participation. Also, the men gained additional support from the BMI program advisors. The BMI programs not only supported and reinforced campus services, but the programs also exposed the men to additional resources both on and off campus. The knowledge and skills gained by the men through support and resources increased their social and cultural capital to also assist in negotiating college. Throughout the students' BMI involvement, they witnessed personal

growth and development that proved to be essential to their self-awareness and understanding. The Barbershop Talks and supplemental, required course proved to be critical to the themes that emerged in the study. All of these experiences established a sense of belonging and connection to the participants' college campus, while promoting persistence and student success among them. By and large, the men in this study attributed much of their student success to the BMI program on their campus, which was evident through each of their narratives.

Thus, the three programs highlighted in this study serve as illustrations of the positive outcomes Black male collegians can procure through their involvement in BMI programs at HWIs that create safe, affirming spaces for Black males to build brotherhood, receive holistic support, and encounter personal and leadership development. These BMI programs serve as examples of productive and effective ways to usher sense of belonging, student success, and persistence among the Black male collegians. If institutions and higher education leaders are truly committed to increasing retention and college completion rates of Black males, then BMIs offer opportunities to provide equip these students with the tools they need to be successful in college and life thereafter.

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## APPENDIX A

<b>Proposed Timeline for Dissertation</b>	
<b>September 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit prospectus to dissertation chair</li> <li>• Solidify research sites</li> <li>• Edit prospectus &amp; compose dissertation proposal</li> </ul>
<b>October 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue editing proposal</li> </ul>
<b>November 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue editing proposal</li> </ul>
<b>December 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule dissertation proposal defense</li> <li>• Submit institutional review board application (UofL)</li> <li>• Submit dissertation proposal to committee</li> </ul>
<b>January 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defend dissertation proposal</li> <li>• Begin data collection at all 3 sites</li> <li>• Have all data transcribed electronically</li> </ul>
<b>February 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin data analysis</li> <li>• Continue data analysis</li> </ul>
<b>March 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin writing results &amp; discussion chapters</li> <li>• Send drafts by case of results chapters to co-chairs</li> <li>• Edit results chapters</li> <li>• Finish results &amp; begin discussion chapters</li> </ul>
<b>April 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit final draft of dissertation to co-chairs &amp; set dissertation defense date</li> <li>• Submit final draft of dissertation to committee Continue edits to draft of dissertation</li> <li>• Defend dissertation</li> <li>• Complete edits to dissertation</li> <li>• Submit final dissertation to SIGS by April 27th</li> </ul>
<b>May 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduation</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B

### Letter to liaisons at participating institution for study

Date

Dear [Name],

I am a PhD student pursuing a degree in Higher Education Administration at the University of Louisville. I am seeking your assistance with my dissertation research. For my dissertation research, I am interested in exploring how Black male initiatives (BMI) impact Black male undergraduate students at historically White institutions through a qualitative, multi-site case study method. I am defining BMI programs as leadership or retention programs aimed at enhancing persistence and overall success among Black males in college. For the purposes of this study, I am intentionally focusing on institutionally-supported initiatives or programs created by colleges and universities that have been in existence for at least two academic years. The overarching goal of my study is to use the voices of Black males who participate in BMIs to help improve overall persistence and success of Black male collegians.

As a part of my study, I would like to include your program, [program name] as a research site; on my part, this would entail gathering documents about your program (i.e. mission statements, strategic plans, annual reports, or evaluations), attending a program event for observation, and facilitating a focus group of 6 to 10 Black male undergraduate students who have been actively engaged in your program for at least one academic year. Should you allow me to use your program as a research site, I would need your assistance in gathering documents and coordinating dates, times, and locations for the observation and focus group. Additionally, I would need your assistance in recruiting students to participate in the focus group. The observation should last at least one hour, and the focus group should last approximately 90 to 120 minutes. It is my hope to schedule the aspects of the study in a consecutive 2 to 3-day period of time, as I will have to travel to your institution to collect data.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in using your program and participants as a part of my dissertation research, as well as helping to coordinate various aspects of the site visit. I want to emphasize that the results of this study will be used specifically for my dissertation. All data collected will be stored and kept completely confidential; anonymity will be maintained to protect the program, focus group participants, and yourself.

With this letter, I am requesting written agreement affirming that you allow me to conduct research with your program. To adhere to my research schedule and proper planning, please provide this confirmation by [date]. After the confirmation is received, I will contact you regarding further plans and details concerning the research opportunity.

I greatly appreciate your time and potential participation in my study. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Jarrod E. Druery  
Doctoral Student  
University of Louisville  
Jarrod.druery@louisville.edu

## APPENDIX C

### Student Focus Group Interview Protocol

Hello everyone. My name is Jarrod Druery and I am a PhD student at the University of Louisville. I will be facilitating this interview today on your experiences and participation in [program name]. First, I would like to thank each of you for volunteering to participate in this interview. I do not take your time, participation, and experiences lightly. This interview will be a part of my dissertation research which explores the college experiences of Black male undergraduate students. I am conducting this study under the supervision of my dissertation co-chairs Drs. Jacob Gross and Derrick Brooms. They can be reached at [jacob.gross@louisville.edu](mailto:jacob.gross@louisville.edu) and [broomsdr@ucmail.uc.edu](mailto:broomsdr@ucmail.uc.edu), respectively.

The purpose of the study is to find out your experiences and use those to improve Black male persistence and success in college. This session is scheduled for approximately 120 minutes, but we may get done earlier. I want you all to think of this as simply an open dialogue; I will ask questions to the whole group and facilitate the discussion where everyone is encouraged to provide your thoughts, reactions, and feedback to each question. This session will be audio and video recorded in order for me to capture every aspect of our discussion today, while keeping track of your responses throughout the conversation. Upon completion of the focus group, I will solicit your feedback on the questions and flow of the discussion.

Are there any questions for me?

To reiterate the information that was provided to you previously, please note that:

(1) You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with [institution]. If you do have to leave, then please let me know as soon as possible.

(2) In accordance with national research regulations, all information shared in the interview will not be connected to your identity specifically in any way. Therefore, each of you will create a pseudonym to identify your responses in any written documentation that is published in order to protect your identity and maintain a high level of confidentiality. Although every effort will be made to keep your personal information collected during this interview confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. If you choose to share your pseudonym with other participants, then I cannot promise full confidentiality. All transcriptions of the interview, audio and video recordings, and other data collected will be destroyed via shredding and permanently deleted from all password protected computer files once the research and my dissertation are completed.

(3) Before we begin the discussion, I am asking all participants to complete a Participant Profile Questionnaire which asks for demographic information. This information will be solely used for documenting characteristics about you as a participant in this study. Please complete the form as much as possible. Please do not put your name on the form, but instead provide your preferred pseudonym. This information will be kept secure and private.

Are there any questions for me?

I am providing you with the Participant Profile Questionnaire now; please fill this out clearly and neatly and to the best of your ability. Once you are done with it, please hand it to me. We will get started with the discussion once everyone has completed the questionnaire. If there are any questions about the form or any general questions, then please let me know.

We will not get started. Is everyone ready?

To start off let's do brief introductions stating your name, classification, major, and hometown.

{Facilitate/Ask Focus Group Questions }

1. What was your motivation for attending college?
2. How would you describe your student experience at this institution?
3. What have been some obstacles you have had to overcome while being in college?  
\*Follow-up question: how have you overcome these obstacles?
4. What is your level of knowledge with navigating this institution in terms of resources?
5. What sources of support have you found to be helpful as a student at this institution?
6. What has been the most rewarding part of being at this institution?
7. What purpose does [program name] serve?
8. How has [program name] impacted you?
9. What could [program name] do better in serving students?
10. What advice would you share with incoming Black male students to help them succeed in college?
11. How do you feel your voice as a Black male is or is not heard on campus?

We have come to the end of our discussion. At this point, is there anything else you want to share about your college experience? [Pause] Thank you all for sharing your thoughts and experiences throughout this interview. Once again, I appreciate you all taking time out of your busy schedule to assist me in my research. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to share those with me now or by phone or email. Also as a reminder, you can also contact Dr. Jacob Gross or Derrick Brooms who are supervising my research. You all are free to go now. Thanks again.

APPENDIX D

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

(Please read first)

This questionnaire is intended to capture demographic information about the participants of the current study. For those agreeing to participate, please print clearly and complete the questionnaire to the best of your ability.

\*In order to maintain anonymity, please do NOT write or provide your name on this questionnaire.

Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Academic Information

Classification:  Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  Senior

Major(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Minor(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Current Cumulative GPA: \_\_\_\_\_/4.00 scale or (other scale: \_\_\_\_\_)

Race/Ethnicity: (Please check **ONE** category)

- African American/Black       LatinX  
 Biracial/Multiracial       Other

Ethnicity(ies): Please specify if applicable \_\_\_\_\_

Family Information:

Family Structure: (Please check **ONE** category)

- Two Parents       Guardian (not a parent)  
 Single Parent Household (mother)       Single Parent Household (father)  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please Specify)

Parental Education:

What is the highest level of education that your mother completed? (Please check **ONE** category)

- Some High School       High School Graduate       Associate's Degree  
 Some College       Bachelor's Degree       Master's Degree  
 Doctoral or Professional Degree (Ph.D., Ed.D, M.D., J.D., Pharm.D)

What is the highest level of education that your father completed? (Please check **ONE** category)

- Some High School       High School Graduate       Associate's Degree  
 Some College       Bachelor's Degree       Master's Degree  
 Doctoral or Professional Degree (Ph.D., Ed.D, M.D., J.D., Pharm.D)

Socioeconomic Background: (Please check the **BEST** category that fits your family's status)

- Lower Income       Middle Class       Upper Middle Class       Upper Class

Future Career Aspiration(s): (Please specify)

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Student Engagement Information:<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>

Please list **ALL** the undergraduate organizations and activities you are involved in:

Student Programs/Organizations (if any)

Leadership Positions (if any)

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University Honors, Awards, and Achievements (and year)

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Program Experience:

How long have you been involved in the BMI program?

- Less than 1 year       1 year       2 years  
 3 years       4 years       More than 4 years

What program activities have you participated or been engaged?

- Meetings       Workshops       Round Table Discussions  
 Study Groups       Tutoring       Advising  
 Mentoring       Service Projects       Group Travel  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the questionnaire to Mr. Druery when complete. Thank you for your participation.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Jedruery, J. E.

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**EDUCATION**

- Ph.D. Educational Leadership & Organizational Development 2018  
 Emphasis: Higher Education Administration  
 Dissertation: *Fostering Sense of Belonging: A Multi-Case Study of Black Male Retention Initiatives*  
 University of Louisville
- M.Ed. Leadership Education & Communication 2013  
 Concentration: Higher Education Administration  
 Texas A&M University
- B.S. Human Resources Development 2009  
 Minor: Business Administration  
 Texas A&M University

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

- Graduate Research Assistant* 2015 – present  
 Department of Educational Leadership & Organizational Development  
 University of Louisville
- Program Coordinator of Academic Support Initiatives* 2013 – 2015  
 Department of Residence Life  
 Texas A&M University
- Academic Advisor* 2010 – 2013  
 Department of Health & Kinesiology  
 University of Louisville

**RESEARCH INTERESTS**

- |                           |                                       |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Postsecondary Education   | Student Development & Success         |
| Colleges and Universities | Black Male Collegians                 |
| Campus Climate            | Race, Racism, & Racial Battle Fatigue |
| Retention & Persistence   | Organizational Development            |

**PUBLICATIONS**

- In Press*
- Druery, J. E.** & Brooms, D. R. (In Press). ‘It lit up the campus’: Engaging Black males in culturally enriching environments.
- Works in Progress*
- Druery, J. E.** (In Progress). The fight of my life: A review of racial battle fatigue among Black students.

**Druery, J. E.,** McKinley, T., Woods, J., & Bergman, M. (In Progress). Prior learning assessment in retention of military and veteran students.

Brooms, D. R., Clark, J. S., and **Druery, J. E.** (In progress). “We can redefine ourselves”: Enhancing Black college men’s success in a BMI program.

## **CONFERENCE PAPERS & PRESENTATIONS**

### *Conference Presentations*

**Druery, J. E.** (2018). Student retention in the face of racial battle fatigue. *NASPA Annual Conference*. March 3-7, 2018. Philadelphia, PA.

**Druery, J. E.,** (2017). Lighting up the campus and creating spaces of support through Black male initiatives. *42<sup>nd</sup> ASHE Annual Conference*. November 8-11, 2017. Houston, TX.

**Druery, J. E.** (2017). An examination of engagement in Black male initiatives. *5<sup>th</sup> Annual Black Doctoral Network Conference*. October 26-29, 2017. Atlanta, GA.

**Druery, J. E.,** Cummings, V. L., & Cousin, B. J. (2017). This battle is not yours or is it?: Examining the impact of racial battle fatigue. *NASPA Annual Conference*. March 12-15, 2017. San Antonio, TX.

### *Poster Presentations*

George-Jackson, C. E., Wolniak, G. W., Nelson, G., **Druery, J. E.,** Williams, T., & Moramarco, M. (2016). Postsecondary differential tuition practices: Challenges to researching college affordability. March 17-19, 2016. Association for Education Finance and Policy. Denver, CO.

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

Instructional Strategies in Education, *Teaching Assistant* Spring 2018  
ELEOD Department, University of Louisville

Problem Analysis in Educational Leadership, *Teaching Assistant* Spring 2018  
ELEOD Department, University of Louisville

Diversity in Higher Education, *Teaching Assistant* Fall 2017;  
ELEOD Department, University of Louisville Spring 2016

Teaching and Learning, *Teaching Assistant* Fall 2017  
ELEOD Department, University of Louisville

Diversity in the Workplace, *Teaching Assistant* Spring 2016  
ELEOD Department, University of Louisville

Resource Management in Postsecondary Education, *Teaching Assistant* Spring 2016  
ELEOD Department, University of Louisville

**HONORS & AWARDS**

ACPA Men & Masculinities Emerging Scholar ACPA Annual Conference, Columbus, OH	2017
Graduate Student Professional Travel Scholarship University of Louisville	2016

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

American College Personnel Association (ACPA)	2017 – present
Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)	2016 – present
Black Doctoral Network (BDN)	2016 – present
Southern Association of College Student Affairs (SACSA)	2013
Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA)	2012 – present

**SERVICE**

<i>President</i> Multicultural Association of Graduate Students, University of Louisville	2017 – present
<i>Graduate Student Representative</i> Commission for Diversity and Racial Equality, University of Louisville	2016 – present
<i>Steering Committee Member</i> Commission for Diversity and Racial Equality, University of Louisville	2016 – present
<i>Graduate Student Representative</i> Commission for Diversity and Racial Equality, University of Louisville	2016 – present
<i>Planning Committee</i> SA Speaks, NASPA	2014 – 2015

**ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS**

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Training Module	2015; 2017
Diversity & Difficult Dialogue Training	2016
Responsible Conduct of Research CITI Training Module	2015