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Hear Their Voices: Black Male Student Perceptions of Retention Initiatives At an HSI in the Midwest

Joshua Watson

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Hear Their Voices: Black Male Student Perceptions of Retention Initiatives

At an HSI in the Midwest

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the National College of Education
National Louis University

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DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to my father, Silas L Watson. I am appreciative of the lessons you taught me about life, being a man, and making every day on this earth count. Thank you for the wisdom, encouragement, and motivation you have provided and continue to provide in my life. This research study is also dedicated to my mother, Annie L Watson, thank you for your inspiration throughout my life.

ABSTRACT

The enrollment of Black male students in colleges and universities over the last 30 years increased yet Black male retention rates have not increased proportionately to the enrollment rates of Black male students. Many colleges and universities recognized the importance of increasing Black male retention and invested millions of dollars in Black male retention initiatives, mentorship initiatives as well as hiring additional staff dedicated to Black male retention. Black male students use a variety of social support systems and coping strategies to persist in college despite facing economic, social, and political barriers to persistence. However, many Black male retention initiatives at colleges and universities do not include the input of Black male students in the construction, implementation, or evaluation of Black male retention initiatives. In this phenomenological research study, the researcher explored the lived experiences and perceptions of Black male retention initiatives of six Black male students and six staff at Northsun University, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in the Midwest to determine the importance of an alignment between Black male students' methods of persisting and Black male retention initiatives.

Findings suggest that Black male students persist in college using a variety of social support systems and coping strategies, specifically peer mentoring, peer support, and informal affinity groups, but do not feel these support systems and coping strategies are reflected in the retention plans of Northsun University. Furthermore, there seems to be a disconnect between Black male student *actual* persistence methods and *assumed* persistence methods which has led to a low degree of engagement in Black male retention initiatives Northsun University provided.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 included provisions aimed at preventing discrimination in education and warned administrators at these schools that federal funds would be withheld if these schools were noncompliant with the equal opportunity mandate (Williamson, 1999). Although this act helped to increase enrollment of African American students at colleges and universities in the United States, it did not lead to increased retention rates among Black students (Hilton & Ray, 2015). In 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), indicated that only 36.4% of Black male students completed an undergraduate degree in six years compared to 52% of Latino Students and 63% of White male students (NCES, 2022). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the Black male graduation rate in 2004 was 30.4% (NCES, 2004). It is notable that graduation rates among Black males increased marginally despite efforts and targeted initiatives by colleges and universities to substantially increase graduation rates among Black males.

Black males' college persistence and graduation rates are important because college degree attainment remains a primary predictor of wealth attainment and social mobility. Persistence can be defined as the strategies and support systems that students use to continue in their college studies when faced with academic, social, or personal challenges (Hagedorn, 2006). Persistence is analyzed from the perspective of the student. Retention can be defined as the rate at which students return from one year to the next (Soika, 2020) Retention is analyzed from the perspective of the institution. Retention and persistence are separate but linked phenomena in that students often need assistance from the institution to persist and it is in the best interest of the institution to actively retain students.

Persistence and retention in college for Black males is important because both phenomena contribute to the graduation rate of Black males, which can influence the long-term economic prospects of Black males. For example, in a 2019 survey of Consumer Finances, the median net worth of White families in the United States was \$188,000 compared to \$24,000 for Black families, while the mean net worth for White families was \$983,000 compared to \$142,000 for Black families (Bhutta et al.,2020). Net worth is built over time and can be transferred from generation to generation. One of the main ways that systemic inequities in net worth accumulation by Black families could be remedied is by educational attainment, which would allow Black families to build generational wealth that can be transferred from generation to generation (Parsons & Parsons, 2021).

Many retention models indicate that for students to persist throughout their college career, students must be integrated into the social and academic communities of the college (Tinto, 1993). For example, according to Solorzano et al. (2000), many Black male students enroll in colleges and universities that are vastly different from the communities in which they were raised. As a result, many Black male students struggled to fit into the college communities they found themselves in. Broome (2017) found that enhancing the climate Black men experience on campus significantly contributes to their persistence. In Broome's study, enhancing campus climate referred to the variety of ways that Black males could receive social support while on campus, which helped to strengthen Black male beliefs that they could look to the institution for support. Broome found that enhancing the campus environment influenced Black males' social engagement on campus and that peer networks were instrumental in influencing Black males' academic, social, emotional, and psychosocial perspectives regarding the importance and feasibility of persistence in college.

Although there is growing literature on Black male persistence and retention strategies targeted towards Black male students, it is important to note that much of the literature on Black males focuses on persistence strategies used by Black males at colleges or universities or the effectiveness of retention strategies aimed at Black males. Much of the literature that combines the retention strategies of colleges and universities while also deeply analyzing the experience of Black males has been written since 2015. For example, Goings (2017), a leading researcher in Black male experiences in higher education, discussed the deficit narrative present in Black male higher education research that perpetuates a narrative that Black males lack the skills to succeed in college.

Brooms, another leading researcher on the topic, wrote articles that discuss the connection between Black male retention initiatives and Black male experiences on college campuses since 2015. For example, Brooms (2021) discussed how the benefits that Black men received from engaging in a Black male leadership program and how the program shattered stereotypes they may have held about themselves. Brooms (2017) noted the importance of peer support and faculty mentoring as important for Black male persistence on campus. In addition, Brooms (2019) summarized how a select group of 23 Black men from a large, public urban university discussed how their engagement in a Black Male Initiative (BMI) influenced their college persistence. Ottley and Ellis (2019) summarized the differences in perceptions of Black male retention initiatives between students and staff and how these differences affected the success of these initiatives.

Black male college completion rates declined over the past 20 years, particularly when one compares data from 2004 and 2022 (NCES, 2004, 2022). Although, there was not a steep decline in the college completion rate for Black male and some progress was made, it is

important to investigate why retention strategies aimed at Black male students have not moved the Black male college completion rate in a meaningful, measurable ways so that additional sustainable progress can be made that can be replicated at different types of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It is also important to consider how retention and persistence strategies aimed at Black male students reflect and incorporate the realizations of the effect of institutionalized barriers to college attainment on Black males' motivation, confidence, sense of belonging and willingness to seek assistance in college. Black male students employ many strategies to cope with challenges and persist in college. Personal and cultural support systems such as familial support, peers, faculty, and staff mentorship are crucial factors in persistence that should be considered when planning retention efforts (Harper, 2015). There may be ways to incorporate key elements of these strategies into retention efforts or leverage the strategies in partnerships with retention efforts.

Problem Statement

There are two main problems that this research study addressed. First, the factors that affect the persistence and retention of Black male college students have not changed substantially over the past 17 years in response to social, political, and economic forces despite increasing Black male enrollment in college and substantial efforts by HEIs. For example, Black male college enrollment in the United States was 26% in 2004 and 31.0% in 2021 (NCES, 2021). During this same period, the Black male college graduation rate was 30.4% in 2004 and 36.4% for the 2021-2022 academic year (NCES, 2022). Colleges tried to increase Black male enrollment by hiring for positions targeted towards increasing Black male enrollment as well as funding Black male retention initiatives (Weismann, 2021). Second, although progress was made on Black male retention initiatives, this progress was not substantial and sustainable. To achieve

sustainable, measurable progress in the retention of Black males, HEIs must update their retention strategies to better align with the current ways that Black male students at their institution persist in college despite the obstacles or barriers to persistence that they may encounter.

Historical institutionalized barriers to persistence can be defined as any policy, rule, practice that results in and supports a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race (Banks et al., 2019). In the context of a college, historical institutionalized barriers to persistence are ingrained into the fabric of the college or university in such a way that these barriers are invisible and simply a part of the way the college or university works. These historical institutional barriers can range from implicit bias found in the actions of some college and university admissions professionals, faculty, student affairs and academic affairs professionals to a lack of cultural competency regarding a particular racial or ethnic group (Frawley et al., 2020).

Retention strategies employed by HEI are not fully aligned with the myriad of support systems and coping strategies employed by Black male students (Beale et al., 2019). Instead, retention strategies tend to treat Black male students as a monolith in a way that minimizes the unique experiences of Black males on and off campus (Beale et al., 2019). In some instances, Black males on college campuses are stereotyped and labeled as urban, inner-city, and at-risk (Dancy, 2012; Howard, 2013). Harper (2003) found that Black males in college were labeled as troublesome and often treated in an adverse manner. Beale et al. (2019) found that most of the literature on Black males in college focus on negative items associated with underachievement. Beale et al. (2019) found that group-defining nomenclature, such as dropouts, underprepared,

and endangered species, do not highlight the strengths and experiences of Black male students who are persisting in college.

Sense of belonging is considered one of the most important factors in Black male persistence as discussed by Brooms (2017), Strayhorn (2012), and Harper (2015). One of the dangers of a misalignment of the persistence and coping strategies of Black males on campus and retention strategies used by colleges and universities is that over time, Black male students can feel isolated and alone because the retention strategies are not effective for them on a personal level (Brooms, 2017). A feeling of isolation can lead to a loss of a sense of belonging on a college campus (Strayhorn, 2012). A reduction in a sense of belonging on college campuses through persistent microaggressions or inadequate institutional support can render the coping and persistence strategies that African American male students use to overcome institutionalized barriers to persistence ineffective (Brooms, 2017).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand coping strategies and support systems used by current Black male students who persisted at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), which in this research study will be referred to by a pseudonym as Northsun University. This research study sought to understand the persistence of current Black male students despite social, political, and economic barriers to persistence, and the degree to which current retention strategies used by Northsun University reflect, align, and interconnect with the persistence strategies, lived experiences and historical institutionalized barriers to persistence experienced by Black male students. The congruence or divergence of retention efforts enacted by Northsun University staff and students' persistence strategies are examined and discussed to build an understanding of how these might work together to support student success.

The researcher emphasizes the type of resources currently provided by Northsun University to Black male students to help them persist and the degree to which these resources meet the needs of current Black male students. There is also an emphasis on the ways in which Northsun University staff measure the success or failure of Black male retention efforts and the sources of feedback on the success or failure of these retention initiatives. Finally, the researcher examined the openness of Northsun University staff to revising Black male retention efforts based on feedback from Black male students.

In this study, the researcher also focused on how the type of institution a Black male student attends affected their retention and persistence. Traditionally, Black male students that attend college often have a choice of attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) or a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The Higher Education Act of 1965 defined a HBCU as any Historically Black College that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was and is the education of Black Americans (About HBCUs, 2024). A PWI is often defined as any institution where much of the student body attending that institution is White (Bourke, 2016). An HSI is often defined as an institution that has an enrollment of at least 25% Hispanic students and can be 2- or 4-year institutions (Title V Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program, 2016). The designation of an institution as an HSI allows an institution to receive federal granted money to fund programs aimed at assisting the minority population of an HSI (Title V Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program, 2016). In 2023, there was an increase in minority students attending HSIs (Burbage, 2022).

Researchers found that Black male students who attend Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) experience hostile learning environments and a profoundly lower degree of sense of

belonging primarily from racism, discrimination, and alienation (Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Harper, 2012; Valdandra et al., 2022, Milner et al., 2023). The lower degree of sense of belonging impacts graduation rates, grades, satisfaction, and their desire to continue their graduation. Booker and Whatley (2019) found that Black male students' outcomes, such as graduation and retention at HBCUs, increased due to the benefits of faculty, peer, and community interactions with other Black students. The researchers found an increased sense of belonging and validation and positive student outcomes regarding retention and graduation for Black male students.

However, most literature regarding Black male experiences at HSIs was published since 2017. HSIs are often celebrated for their diversity but the experiences of Black males at HSI often do not match the reputation of HSIs as being supportive environments for students from a wide variety of social and academic backgrounds (Garcia, 2019). Garcia (2019) found that some minority students at HSIs felt that these institutions employed mostly White instructors with a Eurocentric curriculum that in many ways replicates racism and discrimination in ways similar to PWIs. Pirtle et al. (2020), when investigating the experience of Black male students at HSIs, discovered that some students had similar experiences to Black male students who enrolled in PWIs. Abrica et al. (2020) found that Black male students experienced forms of anti-blackness and a lack of support in some instances.

Harper (2018) studied the experiences of Black male students at an urban HSI. Harper found that many Black male students reported having their intelligence questioned by college faculty and staff and were thought of as unprepared by some members of the college community. However, other researchers found that Black males persist at HSIs due to the support of peers and faculty at the HSI and the formation of their own support networks that helped to increase persistence (Brooms, 2020; Reddick et al., 2012; Serrano, 2020). For this research study, the type

of institution a Black male student chose to attend was important because it affected the ability of a Black male student to persist given the campus environment. It is important to note that although only 1 of 3 students at HBCUs are Black males, even though enrollment at HBCUs is increasing (Harris & Stephens, 2023). Many HBCUs are concentrated in a specific region of the country thereby making it difficult for many Black male students to consider these institutions an option (Harris & Stephens, 2023). As a result of negative experiences at PWIs, many Black male students are turning to HSIs due to their reputation of having certain elements that could possibly create a welcoming environment (Brooms, 2021). Additionally, for many Black male students, HSIs are close to home and provide affordability that is not available with PWIs (Brooms, 2023b)

This research study served two main purposes for understanding the experiences of Black male students at HSIs. First, this research study shed light on the dichotomy of HSIs being seen as having certain elements that can provide a welcoming environment for Black male students and increasing sense of belonging and retention but in some instances provide similar hostile environments for Black male students that are found at PWIs. Second, this research study adds to the field of Black male college retention at HEIs through the discussion of factors that could make HSI's unappealing in the eyes of Black male students and possibly provide a template for how to mitigate factors that add to a decreased sense of belonging at HSI's which could ultimately lead to lower Black male retention rates.

Research Questions

It is important to acknowledge that not all Black male students persist in college in the same way. For example, some Black male students may rely more on institutional support to persist in college using the support of peers and bonds formed with certain faculty and staff

members at an institution. Some Black male students may rely more on familial and community support to persist in college. Other Black male students may rely more on intrinsic motivation to persist in college (Brooms, 2019).

Black male students' persistence strategies evolve over time. For example, the ways in which a Black male student would persist in college 10 or 20 years ago will be different than the ways in which a current Black male student persists. The social, economic, and political factors that can affect Black male persistence will also be different currently than they were 10 or 20 years ago. For example, 10 or 20 years ago, affirmative action as an admissions policy in higher education was accepted legally in a way that is not currently accepted, based on the Supreme Court's recent 2023 ruling on affirmative action policies in higher education. The latter can ultimately affect the way HEIs implement certain retention strategies for Black male students (Walker, 2023). Black male retention strategies utilized by HEIs must also change over time to better align with the current persistence strategies utilized by Black males. In consideration of the evolving nature of Black male persistence strategies and Black male retention strategies, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are some of the coping strategies and support systems used by current Black male students who have persisted at this HSI?
2. To what degree do current retention strategies used by the HSI reflect, align, and interconnect with the persistence strategies, lived experiences and historical institutionalized barriers to persistence experienced by Black male students at this HSI?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study addresses a possible lack of alignment between the lived experiences, coping strategies, and methods of persistence used by Black male students and the retention strategies staff at Northsun University used to assist Black male students in persisting. The Black male adult learner success theory (BMALST) created by Dr. Roman Goings (2021) was the theoretical framework for this study. The BMALST focuses on factors that affect Black male adult learners' persistence with a focus on how the lived experiences of Black male adult learners affect their persistence in college (Goings, 2021). The theory focuses on the components of the identity of Black male adult learners who succeed in college despite facing barriers to persistence (Goings, 2021). In this theory, Goings (2021) highlighted the impact that societal views of Black male students, the institutional environment, a student's own support systems and racial pride can have on Black males' persistence. This theory was important for this research study because the theory encapsulates a diverse number of factors that influence a Black male students' ability to persist, including the students' social support system outside of college, the students' intrinsic motivation to persist, and the support the institution can provide to the student in their persistence journey. The BMALST focuses on the relationship between these factors. As a result, factors that influence Black male persistence can be considered together and not in isolation. Using this theory, the researcher approached the study of Black male persistence and the factors that influence Black male persistence in a holistic manner. Finally, BMALST can help to account for the entire demographic of Black male students in colleges and universities if there is an analysis of the relationship between student persistence efforts and college retention efforts.

Definitions

The following terms are used throughout this dissertation:

Barrier: social, political, or economic obstacles to completion of a college degree.

Examples include racist structures, ideologies, ongoing discrimination, socioeconomic disadvantages, and ambiguous affirmative action policies that hinder access and equality (Gavins, 2009).

Cultural capital: the set of linguistic and cultural competencies individuals usually inherit and sometimes learn (Bourdieu, 1986).

Institutional racism: The existence of systemic policies or laws and practices that provide differential access to goods, services, or opportunities of society by race (Morgan et al., 2018).

Retention: The rate at which students return from one year to the next (Soika, 2020).

Persistence: the strategies and support systems that students use to continue in their college studies when faced with academic, social, or personal challenges (Hagedorn, 2016).

Significance of the Study

This research study was significant because it informs the work of student affairs professionals from recruitment through student support by providing deeper understanding of the needs and experiences of Black male students. This research study was significant for the work of higher education staff who might gain more insight into the persistence strategies of Black male students, which will allow for a better alignment of retention strategies with Black male persistence strategies. This study was also significant to Black male students who can assist HEIs that they attend in creating more welcoming, inclusive environments for them, which will aid their persistence. This research study is significant for aiding the campus communities of HEIs in creating a holistic experience for Black male students through a recognition of how the actions of

all members of the campus community influence the campus environment for Black male students.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 1 included an introduction to the topic, problem statement, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, research questions, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 includes a literature review pertaining to student retention at universities and colleges in the United States, the experiences of Black male students, and strategies for their persistence. In Chapter 3, the researcher summarizes the research methods and design, overview of participants in the study, study materials, data collection and analysis, study limitations and his positionality as a researcher in the study. Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the findings and the themes and subthemes in the research study, as well as a discussion of how the findings relate to the research questions. Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of the findings in the research study, the implication of the findings of the study in consideration of the theoretical framework, and a discussion of future research directions.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, there is a focus on retention and persistence models pertaining to the role that the institution and the student played in the student's efforts to persist. Student retention can be defined as the process of helping students meet their own needs so that they will persist in their education towards the achievement of an educational goal (Crosling, 2017). Student persistence also refers to the desire and action of a student to remain in college until graduation (Seidman, 2005). This chapter includes a review of retention and persistence models that highlight the role of the student as the most important factor in student retention as well as retention and persistence models that emphasize the institution as one of the most important factors in student retention. As persistence and retention models progress from the 1970s to the current time, researchers begin to highlight the collaborative nature of the relationship between persistence strategies of students and the retention strategies of the institution for successful completion of college. The research studies in this chapter illustrate a progression in understanding of the factors that influence persistence and retention for students in college as well as a realization that college retention strategies must account for the variety of ways that students of different races, academic backgrounds and socio-economic status persist in college.

It is important to note that many early retention and persistence models did not explicitly focus on Black male students but provided the foundation and research for other retention and persistence models that focused on the experiences of Black male students. Many Black male retention and persistence models share characteristics, specifically terminology, found in early retention and persistence models. As such, it is difficult to understand and analyze Black male retention and persistence models without first analyzing and understanding earlier models. In this chapter, there is a discussion of retention and persistence models exclusively focused on students

of color. Next, there is a discussion of sense of belonging and its importance for persistence and retention in college. Finally, there is an in-depth analysis of the BMALST and the ways in which the theory informed this research study.

Retention and Persistence Models

Retention and persistence models from the 1970s to 1993 focused on the role of the students and the institution in persistence and retention. Each of the retention and persistence models during this time built upon the work of a previous retention and persistence model. For example, Spady's (1971) model of retention and persistence focused on the role of the student integrating into academic and social life of the college. Spady compared leaving college to committing suicide and based his work on Durkheim's suicide theory. Spady theorized that the more a student acclimated to the social and academic life of the college, the less likely they were to leave. Tinto (1993) in his institutional departure model focused on how much a student's prior background influenced the way in which the student integrated into the social and academic life of the college. Tinto also believed that the process for acclimating to college was similar to the way in which a person who committed suicide did not acclimate to their environment. Bean (1980) disagreed with Spady and Tinto in the assumption based on Durkheim's suicide theory that leaving college was similar to the reasons why a person would commit suicide. Instead, in his causal model of student attrition Bean focused on the factors that a HEI could control to help a student to persist in college. Bean's model was the first retention model to extensively focus on the factors outside of the students' personal background as influencing student retention and persistence. Each retention and persistence model focused on the responsibilities of the individual which were to integrate themselves into the life of the institution and the institution

which was to develop programs at the institution that would aid the persistence of students to graduation.

Spady's (1971) Model of Retention and Persistence

Spady's (1971) model of student retention, which is based in sociology, is one of the first retention models to focus on the degree of social integration as a primary predictor of student retention. Spady indicated that each student entered college with a definite pattern of dispositions, interests, expectations, goals, and values shaped by their family background and high school experiences. Spady also believed that a student's entire range of experiences and attributes may influence their ability to accommodate the influences and pressures they may encounter in a new environment. Spady used Durkheim's (1951) theory of social integration to explain that the more suited an individual's background is to the college environment the more social integration they will experience in the college environment. Durkheim originally explained that a lack of social integration into one's community is a reason for suicide. Spady indicated that academic potential, grade performance, intellectual development, friendship support, family background could influence social integration into college, which could in turn influence a student's decision to remain in college.

Spady (1971) considered a variety of factors that can influence a student's grade performance and intellectual development before they arrive at a college. In Spady's (1971) model, social integration influences a student's satisfaction with the college. A student's satisfaction with college influences the student's institutional commitment to stay enrolled at the college. Spady's work was important because it set the stage for researchers to focus on the interaction between the institution and the student in a student's persistence in college. Spady's consideration of a variety of factors that can influence a student's satisfaction with the college

places the responsibility for persistence at the institution on the student rather than the institution sharing an equal part of the responsibility for the student persisting to the completion of their college degree. It is important to highlight that Spady's model does not consider the factors that affect the retention or persistence of minorities students or Black males which illustrates there was not a progression of understanding of the variety of ways that students of different races and socio-economic backgrounds persist in college in the 1970s due to the focus on the persistence of White, upper class male students. A college retention plan focused exclusively on the needs of White upper-class, male students does not allow for retention strategies of colleges and universities to meet the needs of all students.

Tinto's Model of Retention and Persistence

Tinto (1975) built upon Spady's work. Tinto takes a sociological approach to examining the reasons students leave college. Tinto (1975) believed college was a social system with its own value and social structures. He believed that social conditions resulting in a student leaving the social system of the college would resemble that of suicide in wider society. Tinto (1975) believed that the conditions which would result in a student leaving the college would be insufficient interactions with others in the college and insufficient congruency with the value patterns of the college. Tinto (1993) divided the retention into 3 distinct stages: Stage 1: recruitment and admission to college during which colleges and universities should set realistic expectations so that a prospective student can choose the appropriate school (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto believed that colleges and universities should be providing new students with information about the character of institutional life and about the requirements of the academic system in which they will be matriculating (Tinto, 1993). Tinto divided the second stage of retention for college and universities into Pre-Entry Assessment and Placement: Identifying

Student Needs (Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto, during the pre-entry and assessment/placement stage of retention, students should be placed in appropriate first year courses and students should be assessed for counseling and advising purposes (Tinto, 1993). In the final stage of student retention, Tinto believed that colleges should be assisting students with making the social and academic transitions to the new and possibly more challenging life of the college through programs such as first year experiences for students (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto views persistence as a phenomenon that takes place over time. Tinto's division of retention into stages with inputs and outputs places heavy emphasis on the relationship between the variables that lead up to the decision to leave school such as the students family background, skills and attributes and prior schooling. However, unlike Spady's model, Tinto places heavy emphasis on the role of the external community in influencing persistence, specifically interactions between peers, faculty and staff and any extra-curricular activities the student may participate in. Tinto's focus on retention moves closer to a consideration of the collaborative nature of persistence and retention at an institution because he places a greater emphasis on the role of the institution in assisting students with persisting in college. Tinto's views on retention and persistence during this time also do not focus on the factors that affect minority or Black male retention indicating that there was not an intentional focus on the persistence of students at colleges and universities outside of White, male upper-class students.

Bean's (1980) Model of Retention and Student Persistence

Bean (1980) focused on a psychological theory of student retention and discussed the role of student attitudes and behaviors in influencing their intention to persist in college and the importance of the background characteristics of students in their intention to persist. Bean disagreed with Spady (1971) and Tinto's (1993) use of Durkheim's suicide theory in their

student retention models because he did not see an explicit link between the student dropout process and suicidal behavior. Instead, Bean focused on the theoretical views of studies done on turnover in work organizations. Bean (1980) argued that the student dropout process is similar to the reasons that employees leave a job and postulated that student and employee persistence is primarily determined by factors that the organization can control. As a result, Bean replaced the *pay* variable in employee job satisfaction with the following four educational indicators for student satisfaction which are: student GPA, development, institutional quality, and practical value. Bean's (1980) student attrition model contained the following four factors that influence student retention: dropout as a dependent variable, satisfaction and institutional commitment as intervening variables, and organizational determinants as background variables. After a statistical analysis of Price's (1977) turnover model, Bean theorized that institutional commitments were one of the main reasons that men and women left colleges.

In Bean's (1980) retention model there is a connection between the background of a student, the students' environment, and the interaction with the organization which influences outcomes and attitudes and the individual's intent to leave the organization. The model does not have as many variables that affect student persistence and retention when compared to Tinto's (1993) and Spady's (1971) model. Bean's model is one of the early retention and persistence models that focused on the persistence and retention in a holistic way but still places a greater emphasis on the institution as the reason students leave college rather than considering the ways in which the institution and the student can work together to ensure the student completes college. Also, Bean's (1980) model, like Spady (1971) and Tinto (1975) did not focus on different socio-economic classes or races and was intended to explain the persistence and retention of White, male upper-class college student. In the next section, I will discuss

researchers who focused on the relationship between student persistence efforts and institutional retention efforts.

Swail et al.'s (2003) Geometric Model of Student Persistence

Swail et al. (2003) proposed the geometric model of student persistence that focused on the relationship between students and the institutions they attended. The model puts students at the center of all persistence efforts and helps colleges address the questions of what the college can do to help students persist and how institutions can academically and socially integrate students into the campus environment and support their cognitive and social development. The geometric model is shaped like a triangle with forces exerted on the student (Swail et al., 2003). According to Swail et al. (2003) cognitive, social, and institutional factors affect student outcomes. Cognitive factors refer to the pattern of thinking that students bring with them when they come to college. Cognitive factors include academic ability in reading, writing and math. Cognitive factors are important to a student's persistence in college because they affect a student's decision making and problem-solving abilities. Social factors that affect student persistence include a student's ease at integrating with peers and the student's cultural history and personal attitudes. Swail et al. (2003) thought that students would have a hard time persisting if they were not connected to the institution. The final part of the Swail geometric model of persistence was institutional factors which were defined as practices, strategies and cultures of the college or university that impact student persistence and achievement (Swail et al., 2003). Examples of institutional factors that affect student persistence include academic and social support, course content and instruction, and student programming. (Swail et al., 2003).

According to Swail et al. (2003), the student achieves equilibrium or continued persistence when all the forces in the persistence model are balanced, exerting equal forces on

the student. If equilibrium is lost, students depart from college (Swail et al., 2003). The geometric model of persistence represented an important milestone for college retention efforts and strategies because it placed student needs at the center of persistence and could uniquely be used to explain the persistence of students from different socio-economic classes academic backgrounds (Swail et al., 2003). Swail et al. (2003) determined that the geometric model of student persistence allowed institutions to work proactively to support student persistence and achievement (Swail et al., 2003). These authors believed that diagnostic and supplementary knowledge of the student are vital components for the effective operation of the geometric model of persistence (Swail et al., 2003).

Swail et al. (2003) claimed that the Geometric Model of Persistence allowed institutions to move from theoretical conversations about student persistence to a study in practice in the present and over time. These authors thought that the Geometric Model of Student Persistence could be especially useful for studying the persistence of students of color because often their experiences in persisting included a wide range of factors that affected each student differently. Swail's model of persistence is important because it demonstrates a departure from the earlier models of retention and persistence discussed in this chapter that could not explain differences in persistence of non-white students. Swail's model also was instrumental in framing the relationship between student persistence and retention as a collaborative relationship with the needs of the student at the forefront.

Persistence of Students of Color

Rendon's (1994) Validation Theory, published in the *Journal of Innovative Higher Education*, is a seminal work on student retention. Rendon (1994) Validation theory represents a turning point in the study of retention and persistence models because she focused on the needs

of minority students and students from different socio-economic backgrounds in a way that previous research studies did not. In her study, Rendon (1994) and her team interviewed 132 first year students in a minority serving community college in the southwest, a predominantly white, residential, liberal arts college in a middle Atlantic state, a predominantly Black, urban state university in the Midwest; and a predominantly white, residential research university in a middle Atlantic state. Students were selected from diverse personal and academic backgrounds but were mostly nontraditional students. Participants were interviewed in focus groups of 3-6 for one and a half hours on campus using an open-ended interview protocol. The results indicated that many nontraditional students developed feelings of isolation and alienation and were intimidated by the culture of colleges at the time. Rendon discussed how many minority and first-generation college students had “invalidating” experiences in college where they did not feel like they were valued as individuals or students Rendon also noted that many students in the study doubted their ability to persist in college when they matriculated.

Rendon (1994) proposed the use of validation to meet the needs of diverse student populations. Rendon defined validation as an “enabling, conforming and supportive process initiated by in and out of class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development” (p. 44). Rendon expanded her definition of validation by indicating that it is intentional and proactive and acknowledges students as valuable members of a learning community. It was proposed that faculty, through validating actions, can instill a confident, motivating “can-do” attitude within students that can lead to student success learning and development (Rendon, 1994).

Rendon’s (1994) validation theory included the following six components: initiating contact, consistency, validation as one component of student success, affirmation, validation in

and out of the classroom, and validating students early. The first component of Rendon's validation theory was to initiate contact and that faculty and staff would actively reach out to students to offer assistance, encouragement, and support (Rendon, 1994). The next component of Rendon's validation theory was consistency or ensuring that faculty and staff consistently validate students so that they feel confident in themselves (Rendon, 1994). The third component of the theory was the realization that validation should be viewed as the first step in ensuring student success and only one component of development (Rendon, 1994). The fourth component was affirmation by faculty and staff that reinforces the concept that students are capable of learning and to help build up their sense of self-worth by recognizing the strengths and knowledge they bring to the classroom (Rendon, 1994). The fifth component of Rendon's validation theory was that students should be validated in and out of the classroom. The sixth and final component of the validation theory was that validation should be done early in the interaction between the student and faculty and staff to set the stage for the validation theory to be successful (Rendon, 1994).

Rendon's (1994) validation theory was also important because it showed that validation was ongoing and that just as students need to be continually validated to persist in college, student support systems that include out of class validation must be continually nourished. This theory helped to set the stage for a focus on the role that the student plays in their own persistence in collaboration with the role of the college or university. Rendon's (1994) study helped in the progression of research on the factors that affect the persistence of students of different identities and socio-economic backgrounds as well as serving as a model of the ways in which members of the campus community could assist in implementing institutional retention strategies.

Tierney (1999) discussed the flaws of Tinto's (1988) student retention theory which focused on students' needs to assimilate into the dominant culture of a college or university to aid in their persistence. Tierney argued that Tinto's notion of student retention is incorrect because it views going to college as an initiation process. It was also proposed that for students of color to succeed on predominantly White campuses, they must undergo a form of cultural suicide, where they make a clean break with the communities and cultures in which they were raised and integrate and assimilate into the dominant culture of the colleges they attend (Tierney, 1999). According to Tinto, if students of color fully integrate into the dominant college culture, they will be successful and if they fail to assimilate, they will fail to stay in college (Tierney, 1999). Tierney highlighted the importance of cultural capital, a phrase coined by Bourdieu (1986) that referred to the set of linguistic and cultural competencies individuals usually inherit and sometimes learn. Tierney cited McDonough's (1997) work, which asserted that cultural capital is precisely the value schools do not teach. Bourdieu assumed that individuals from middle and upper classes inherit cultural capital through their families and neighborhoods (Tierney, 1999). As a result of an inheritance of cultural capital, these students learn at an early age that admission to colleges is not a choice but a preordained conclusion (Tierney, 1999). While cultural capital is important, minority students can easily shed their cultural heritage and it leaves students in a situation where any real change is not possible (Tierney, 1999).

Tierney (1999) highlighted the importance of cultural integrity, which he defined as school-based strategies and teaching programs that engage students' racial/ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner toward the development of more relevant pedagogies and learning activities. When minority college students can affirm their own cultural identities, their chances for graduation increase (Tierney, 1999). Tierney theorized that if postsecondary institutions make

concerted and meaningful efforts to affirm these students' cultural identities, they gain increased possibilities for ensuring students' success in college if the education students receive involves a commitment to academic and social goals and active learning.

Tierney (1999) discussed how the ideas of cultural capital and cultural integrity jointly push educators away from the notion that increased funding or cultural assimilation will resolve the inequitable opportunities for many minority students in the United States. The notion of cultural integrity helps to identify cultural background as an essential element for academic success (Tierney, 1999). Tierney's notions about the importance of cultural background for minority student success in college aligns with Rendon's (1994) validation theory and the importance of in class and out of class validation for students. Kuh et al. (2004) discussed eight culturally based propositions for understanding student departure that include the role of culture in helping students persist due to receiving support from other members of a student's culture. Rendon (1994), Tierney (1999) and Kuh et al (2004) are research studies that highlight an understanding of the importance of the roles of students and institutions in persistence but highlight the need for colleges to affirm the unique factors that influence the persistence or students with different identities and socio-economic backgrounds.

Black Student Persistence

Guiffrida (2003) analyzed the ways that social integration can assist Black student persistence at PWIs. Guiffrida tested Tinto's (1993) social integration theory. In his qualitative study, Guiffrida interviewed 88 African American students from a midsize (under 11,000 undergraduates) predominantly White university in the Northeastern part of the United States (Guiffrida, 2003). The gender composition of study was 45% male and 55% female with 16 freshmen, 39 sophomores, 18 juniors, and 15 seniors (Guiffrida, 2003). The study included

actively involved students as well as those with little involvement in African American organizations (Guiffrida, 2003). Small focus groups were used in the study to obtain more real-world dialogue with focus groups consisting of 2 to 6 students (Guiffrida, 2003). Students were first asked open-ended questions and then asked to describe assets to their college experience (Guiffrida, 2003). Students listed faculty, academic advisors, and family as assets to their college experience but participation in African American student organizations emerged as an asset from every focus group (Guiffrida, 2003). After the focus groups, individual interviews were conducted with students to allow them to expand upon and clarify statements made during the focus group interviews (Guiffrida, 2003).

Guiffrida (2003) found that academic honors groups, Greek societies, religious groups, political organizations, and student government facilitated cultural connection and social integration into the university. The previously mentioned organizations were important to Black students because they assisted them in establishing out of class connections with faculty, provided them with opportunities to give back to other Blacks, and allowed them to feel comfortable being around others perceived as like them (Guiffrida, 2003). Black students in the study commented that Black student organizations allowed them to “be themselves” instead of having to “code switch” or present one version of themselves to Whites at the university and another version of themselves to African Americans at the university (Guiffrida, 2003).

Guiffrida’s study is important because the author identified a “coping” and persistence strategy that Black students used to “stay connected” to their culture rather than “abandon” their culture as Tinto (1993) suggested in his study. Guiffrida pointed out that not all Black student needs at colleges and universities can be met through Black student organizations (Guiffrida, 2003). The author also noted out that Black students from predominantly White communities did not

struggle as much to integrate into university culture as Black students from predominantly Black communities (Guiffrida, 2003).

Guiffrida (2004) continued his study of Black student persistence and explored the contributions that the friends from the home communities of Black students made to their persistence. Guiffrida noted that literature, up until 2004, proved that Black families played a critical role in their persistence. However, he also noted that little research had been done on the role of friends in Black student's persistence. In Guiffrida's (2004) study, 99 students from a midsized PWI university located in the Northeastern part of the United States were interviewed. Students from various levels of academic achievement, including current students, high achieving and struggling students, students that left the university but did not graduate, and students who graduated. Interview sessions were auto recorded and transcribed (Guiffrida, 2004). Guiffrida stated that the purpose of this study was not to generalize about the influence of friends on the persistence of Black students but to understand Black students' perspective of the influence of their friends on their persistence. Interviews began with open-ended questions to allow participants to guide the study and follow-up interviews were scheduled to allow participants to elaborate on their points (Guiffrida, 2004).

Guiffrida (2004) found that among students who left the university and those who struggled academically, a fear of losing the connection with friends from their home communities was a motivating factor in their decision to leave the university (Guiffrida, 2004). Some found that their friends from home thought they had "changed" because of the students trying to integrate into the community at the University (Guiffrida, 2004). These students discussed that they were trapped between trying to adapt to their college community while also maintaining a connection to their culture. Some students found that when they went home, it was

difficult to focus and complete their work (Guiffrida, 2004). As a result, in the case of students who left the university and those struggling academically, friends from home communities were seen as a liability (Guiffrida, 2004).

Guiffrida (2004) also found that, among students who persisted and graduated from the university, as well as current students who were high achievers, some friends from home supported and encourage them to persist. Guiffrida found that for some high achievers and students who graduated, college persistence helped students eliminate friends who were not positive influences (Guiffrida, 2004). Some high achievers and students who graduated broke ties with some friends from home because of a perception that they could no longer relate to the students' experiences (Guiffrida, 2004). Guiffrida found that friends from home who attended other PWIs served as a stronger support system for Black students than friends who did not attend college or those who attended a diverse college institution. This study is important because it emphasized the multiple factors that can influence a Black student's intention to persist or not. Guiffrida's study advanced research on Black student persistence through his insistence on the many factors that influence Black student persistence.

Hausmann et al. (2007) built upon Guiffrida's (2004) work by focusing on the role of a sense of belonging in Black student persistence. Hausmann et al. conducted their study at a large, public, predominately White university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The researchers examined the relationship between students' sense of belonging and their intention to persist using individual growth curve modeling. Specifically, Hausmann et al. focused on whether sense of belonging predicts intention to persist, and the effects of interventions designed to increase sense of belonging. Black and White students completed surveys three times

throughout the academic year. The researchers defined a sense of belonging as a psychological sense that one is a valued member of the college community.

Black and White students were randomly assigned to a group that received an intervention designed to increase student sense of belonging or to one of two control groups (Hausmann et al., 2007). All first-year Black students were invited to participate and a random sample of 291 White students were invited to participate (Hausmann et al., 2007). Surveys were mailed to possible participants during the second week of the fall semester and 145 Black students responded and 220 White students responded (Hausmann et al., 2007). Another survey was mailed during the second week of the spring semester with 94% of both White and Black students responding (Hausmann et al., 2007). A third survey was mailed during weeks 11 of 17 of the spring semester (Hausman et al., 2007). The response rate for the third survey was 96% for Whites and 89% for Blacks (Hausmann et al., 2007). The surveys were designed to measure financial difficulties, social and academic integration, peer and parental support, sense of belonging, institutional commitment, and intention to persist at the end of first and second semester (Hausmann et al., 2007).

The university used a multi-pronged approach to increase sense of belonging among students (Hausmann et al., 2007). The approaches the university used consisted of receiving letters from various members of the university administration including deans, the provost, and Vice-Provost. (Hausmann et al., 2007). The letters stated that the students were valued members of the university community and their responses to the survey would be used to improve campus life for all students (Hausmann et al., 2007). The students also received small gifts from the university that emphasized and reminded the students of their connection to the university (Hausmann et al., 2007). These gifts consisted of id holders, magnets, and decals that displayed

the university name, logo, and colors (Hausmann et al., 2007). Students in one control group received the survey but did not receive the communication from administration or the logo bearing gifts designed to increase the student's sense of belonging while the other control group received both the communication from admin and the logo bearing gifts (Hausmann et al., 2007). The results of the study showed that a sense of belonging increased students' intention to persist, then controlling for background variables and other predictors of persistence (Hausmann et al., 2007). Hausmann et al. (2007) found that sense of belonging, and persistence declined throughout the academic year but declined at a smaller pace for students who received an intervention from the university. The researchers found that a sense of belonging significantly increased for African American students in relation to peer support and parental support compared to White students (Hausmann et al., 2007).

Donahoo et al. (2010) focused on the role of the church in providing social and academic benefits to African American college students who were involved in the church. The researcher administered online questionnaires using Question-Pro, which is a web-based service that facilitates the collection of large amounts of data, to 25 African American research participants at two American rural universities, one in the Southeast and one in the Midwest.

Donahoo et al. (2010) found that African American students who were highly engaged in religious activities had higher GPA and earned more academic honors. The researchers indicated that African American students found the support and encouragement they received motivated them to stay and succeed in school. Donahoo et al.'s study is important because it builds upon the research of Guiffrida (2003) and Hausmann et al. (2007) in that it illustrates another influence on the persistence of African American students. In the next section, studies that

highlight the many factors that influence the persistence of African American males specifically are reviewed.

Black Male Persistence

Early Black male persistence and retention literature focused on the academic and social deficits of African American males who attempt to persist in college (Kim et al., 2013.) Early Black male persistence and retention literature often portrayed Black males as incapable, unintelligent, disadvantaged, and at risk to fail, often feeding into negative stereotypes (Kim et al., 2013). The portrayal of Black males in early persistence and retention literature fed into a deficit informed framework (Kim et al., 2013). It is important to note that a single retention and persistence theory does not address Black men's experience at college due to the variety of unique factors that explain Black men's persistence in college and the various retention strategies aimed at helping them persist (Ottley & Ellis, 2019). As a result, most of the studies on African American male persistence in college start to coalesce in the 1990s instead of in the 1960s and 1970s as with the traditional college student persistence and retention models of Spady (1971), Bean (1980) and Tinto (1993) mentioned earlier in this literature review. An important starting point for the study of the experience of Black male college students is the study of Black students in general. Prior to 1991 there was no large-scale study of the experiences of Black college students (Allen, 1993).

Walter Allen (1993) focused on the college experiences of 4,000 undergraduate and graduate Black students at eight historically Black and 8 PWI institutions using data from the National Study of Black College students. The National Study of Black College Students used mail survey data and was based at the University of Michigan, which is where the research data

collection and data an analysis were conducted (Allen, 1993). The researchers collected data over three years from 1981-1984 and participants were selected at random (Allen, 1993).

College in Black and White is a seminal work in the study of Black students because it focused on Black students' characteristics, experiences, backgrounds, institutional context, and interpersonal relationships (Allen, 1993). In the beginning of his book, Allen discussed how past research indicated that Black men and women struggled academically and socially at PWIs and had to create their own support networks to persist due to exclusion from the PWI community. Allen (1993) found that Black males at PWI institutions relied more on family and institutional support systems to deal with their personal problems than Black males at HBCUs.

Davis (1994) built upon the work of Allen (1993) by focusing exclusively on the campus environment and its importance to the retention of Black male students. Davis discussed the importance of the campus environment as a factor that influences the attrition of Black males in college. The author noted that most of the research at that time focused on enrollment and attrition data for African American males instead of focusing on the experience of the Black male in college and how African American men coped with the stressors of the college environment.

Davis (1994) noted that African American male enrollment at PWIs exceeded Black males enrolled in HBCUs (Davis, 1994). Davis focused on the relationship among student background and college level factors, such as social support and academic performance, in influencing Black male achievement (Davis, 1994). The researcher also discussed the alarming rates of Black attrition and focused on this throughout the study. In the study, Davis used a 1988 survey of students' academic and social experiences and surveyed 742 Black males who attended PWI and HBCUs.

Davis (1994) found that when the racial composition of the college community was closer to the community of the student, better academic performance was observed. As a result, the Black male students at HBCUs performed better in school than those attending PWIs (Davis, 1994). However, among the students that did well at PWIs, personal and academic background had a profound effect on their academic achievement (Davis, 1994). Students at HBCUs perceived more institutional support than students at PWIs (Davis, 1994). Davis concluded that colleges providing academic support are crucial to the success of Black males' academic achievement.

Davis (1994) was one of the first researchers at the time to focus more on the actual experiences of African American males in relationship to the institution. With this study, Davis illustrated that the persistence of Black males by an institution is dependent not only on the student's individual characteristic and background but also on retention strategies, including the campus environment are present to aid in this persistence.

Cuyjet (1997) focuses on the disproportionate lack of Black men on college campuses compared to Black women (Cuyjet,1997). Cuyjet (1997) discusses that in 1994, Black men had the lowest proportion of students receiving degrees compared to any other race (Cuyjet, 1997). Cuyjet (1997) discusses how since the 1970's the college entry rate of Black men had fallen by 20 percent compared to White men (Cuyjet,1997).

Cuyjet (1997) theorized that Black men not receiving college degrees threatened their ability to provide and would result in a smaller pool of suitable marriage partners for Black women who are completing college degrees at a greater pace (Cuyjet, 1997). Cuyjet (1997) attributes low rates of Black men on college campuses to issues preventing them from getting into college in the first place and issues that make the students unprepared for college when they

arrive. Cuyjet focuses on high rates of incarceration, high school dropouts, high rate of homicide and serious health issues as the reasons why Black men cannot get into college in the first place (Cuyjet,1997). Cuyjet (1997) focuses on unpreparedness resulting from low expectations from significant adults and peers as well as lack of appropriate role models as reasons why Black men struggle upon entering college.

Cuyjet (1997) believed that Black men that arrive on college campuses need special nurturing to help them adapt to the college community. Cuyjet mentions a deficit framework when college campuses encounter Black men and a need to reeducate students, staff, and other administration on college campuses about general negative public beliefs (Cuyjet,1997).Cuyjet discusses the failure syndrome that can be found in some Black males who are on college campuses who internalize negative beliefs about themselves and their abilities (Cuyjet, 1997). Cuyjet believes Black men must be reeducated in a way that will change their attitudes about their abilities (Cuyjet, 1997). Cuyjet believed it is important to survey the needs of African American male students to design strategies to assist them and used data found in the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) (Cuyjet, 1997). The CSEQ was a 191-item questionnaire designed to measure students background, aspirations, and status in college (Cuyjet,1997). Students were asked to estimate the progress they have made in general education development, skill development, personal and social development, relationships on campus, vocational preparedness, and activities they engage in while on campus (Cuyjet, 1997). Cuyjet found that the questionnaire indicated that many African American men struggle in writing and English related courses on campus, as a result, Cuyjet (1997) theorizes that many African American male do not come to college with the same study skills as other students. Cuyjet (1997) found that most African American males students spent a lot of time at the student union

and formed positive relationships there. Cuyjet (1997) found that most Black men did not seek out help or talk about their personal problems compared to Black women. Cuyjet ends his article discussing what administration can do to provide a welcoming learning environment for Black men as well as reeducate others on stereotypes of Black men (Cuyjet, 1997).

Cuyjet's (1997) article is important because he focuses on some things that colleges can do to produce a "welcoming environment" as well as address stereotypes that others may have about Black men. However, Cuyjet's (1997) article fits into the previously described narrative of early researchers on Black men in college focusing too much on the negative aspects of Black males' experiences in college. Cuyjet (1997) does not mention in the article the percentage of Black males who persist in college or graduate. He does not discuss the strategies that Black men who graduate and persist use to achieve their goals. He simply continues to discuss reasons why Black men do not persist. Cuyjet (1997), also does not account for the fact that not all Black men come to college with failure syndrome and that there can be significant differences in the backgrounds of Black males attending college.

Fries-Britt (1997) focused on the portrayal of Black men in society in a way that centered on drugs, crime, athletics, and academic failure. Fries-Britt then focused on the way that research during her time contributed to negative stereotypes of Black men by discussing how researchers focused on Black men's remediation and disadvantages. The author described the importance of focusing on the experiences of gifted Black men and of retaining them (Fries-Britt, 1997). Fries-Britt described giftedness as defined by general academic ability but noted that this definition does not fully encapsulate Black men's abilities.

Fries-Britt (1997) discussed the issues gifted Black men have when adjusting to college and being accused by some peers as "acting White" due to academic excellence and intellectual

pursuits being tied to White students. Fries-Britt also discussed the difficulty of gifted Black students finding peer group connections with similar goals and ambitions. Fries-Britt reported that gifted Black men experience feelings of isolation and loneliness due to lacking any real connection to the college, especially faculty members (Fries-Britt, 1997). The author asserted that feelings of isolation and loneliness may lead to higher attrition rates for gifted Black males.

Fries-Britt (1997) suggested that gifted Black males may need more specialized support to succeed in college and argued for colleges and universities to promote images of academic excellence and Black male role models to the public, rather than reinforce negative stereotypes. The author's article is important because it discusses the role researchers play in promoting a deficit framework that does not highlight the positive attributes of Black men in college (Fries-Britt, 1997). In addition, Fries-Britt analyzed the experiences of Black men in college in a positive way and emphasized what colleges can do to retain them.

LaVant et al. (1997) discussed mentorship as an important strategy for promoting persistence of Black males in college. The authors mentioned previous researchers who found that when colleges and universities have well-conceived and formalized support systems in place, Black men were successful (LaVant et al., 1997). LaVant et al. cited research indicating that to retain Black male students, colleges and universities must provide warm nurturing environments and programs must be implemented to help students connect with university staff and students the moment they step on campus. The authors used Tinto's (1975) theory of social integration as support for the importance of Black males being implemented into the social and academic fabric of the college or university quickly.

The authors discussed some important factors for a Black male mentoring program to work at a college or university. One of the most important factors for a Black male mentoring

program to flourish at a university is a genuine commitment by the executive leadership to a formal Black male mentoring program (LaVant et al., 1997). LaVant et al. (1997) also mentioned allocating human resource funds for the program and establishing a university commission to target admitted freshmen who might be a good fit for the program. Finally, the authors discussed the importance of community support for the program, unbiased evaluation of the program's effectiveness, and collaboration among the student affairs, admissions, and registrar departments (LaVant et al., 1997). This article is important because LaVant et al. focused on how Black men in college can be successful with support rather than simply focusing on how the background of a Black male makes it difficult for them to persist in college. It is also important to understand the insights of higher education who were frustrated by the lack of Black males on campus, despite efforts to increase Black male enrollment. Roach (2001) encapsulated the frustrations of higher education leaders in his 2001 article entitled *Where are the Black Men on Campus?*

Roach (2001) focused on the imbalance between the enrollment of Black men at comparable numbers to Black women in Dillard College in New Orleans and the impact that this imbalance has had on the campus beyond the classroom. Roach discussed how this imbalance impacted the quality of Black male-female relationships and can be blamed for soaring rates of incarceration, lack of familiarity with the college environment, and high rates of Black males entering the military. Roach discussed how Cuyjet (1997) found that Black males in academic trouble are less likely to seek help and that there was an increase in Black male withdrawal from student organizations leaving Black males feeling isolated. The article concluded with the author focusing on the importance of making Black men comfortable seeking help (Roach, 2001). Although Roach highlighted how important it is for a college to make Black males comfortable with seeking assistance, the author focused too much on the negative aspect of Black male

persistence and reinforced negative stereotypes as researchers on Black males had done since the early 1990s. Roach's study is important because it highlights the notion that Black male students who are isolated will not collaborate and engage with needed institutional supports like student organizations to persist in college and this isolation could cause Black men to not stay enrolled in college which can be confirmed by the low number of Black males that were enrolled at Dillard College in Roach's (2001) study.

Most of the research studies reviewed in this chapter focused on the Black male collegiate experience in the 1990s and early 2000s and examined Black male persistence from the perspective of Black men in college. Most also examined the barriers faced once they arrived in college and provided recommendations for what college could do to retain Black male students. The studies that attempted to move beyond the statistics of Black men in college and the barriers they faced once getting there were limited by the scope of the studies. The studies on Black males mentioned earlier did not exclusively focus on the experiences of Black males, which means that they offered limited insight on the ways that Black male students persist in college.

Harper (2006) did focus exclusively on the experiences of Black males in colleges and universities. In his research study, Harper (2006) investigated how social reinforcement of racially oppressive assumptions can affect African Americans perceptions of themselves and others within their race. Harper (2006) also investigated if mass media reinforcement, within-race disempowerment and class-based education caused African American men to internalize a devaluation of education that is reinforced by Black families and peers (Harper, 2006). Harper defined internalized racism as when socially stigmatized groups accept and recycle negative messages regarding their aptitudes, abilities, and societal place (Harper, 2006). Harper (2006)

focused on the experiences of high achieving Black male students at 6 predominantly white universities in the Midwest (Harper, 2006). Twelve of the Black male students in the research study came from single family homes while 20 of the Black male students came from home where both parents were present. Harper's study focused on relationships with, and support derived from other for high achieving Black male students. Administrators at the campuses Harper selected were asked to provide the names of high achieving Black male student who had GPAs between 3.0 and 4.0 (Harper, 2006). Students participated in 2-to-3-hour face-to-face interviews using a semi structured interview technique to allow for genuine conversation and at least two follow-up interviews via telephone. Harper (2014) found that internalized racism resulted in self-devaluation and the invalidation of others within the group (Harper, p347, 2006).

Harper (2006) also found that peer support factored significantly in the academic achievement of the Black males who were interviewed (Harper, 2006). Many of the participants attributed their academic achievement to the support of, God, themselves, their parents, and peers (Harper, 2006). The students interviewed also cited the support of Black student organizations as contributing to their academic achievement (Harper, 2006). Based on the results of Harper's study, peer support can be seen as a persistence strategy for Black males. Harper's study is one of the few at the time that focused exclusively on how Black men cope with racism and other barriers to achievement that might be present at PWIs. Harper (2006) reaffirms Fries-Britt's (1997) study that focused on the importance of peer group support and connections for Black males. Harper's research study is a turning point in the study of Black male student persistence at colleges and universities because it is one of the first studies at the time to illustrate how an institution can assist Black male students in persisting through institutional

supports like student organizations but also recognize the importance of personal supports like peer support in Black male persistence.

Guiffrida (2006) departed from prior research on persistence and students of color up to this time by refusing to completely discard Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and instead refining it. Guiffrida suggested that minority students remain connected to members of their home community to persist in college instead of leaving their home community to integrate into the culture of their institution. The importance of *home social systems* or family and friends from home as being important in the persistence of minority students was highlighted (Guiffrida, 2006). Guiffrida believed that these home social systems could help support students once they arrive at college and further refined Tinto's theory of retention by replacing the word *integration* in his theory with the word *connection*. Guiffrida relied on the definition of the word integration from an article by Kuh and Love (2000), which stated integration means that students must become socialized into the dominate culture of their institution while abandoning their former culture, but connection recognizes students' subjective sense of relatedness without implying the need to break ties with one's former community. The author also stated that Tinto's theory can be refined by recognizing the need for students to remain connected to their cultural heritages and traditions to succeed in college (Giuffrida, 2006).

Guiffrida (2006) cited qualitative studies that indicate minority college students have found that family and members of their home communities provided cultural connections and nourishment that assisted minority students in coping with racism, cultural isolation, and other adversity they experienced at college. He indicated that cultural connections play a much larger role in the persistence of college students than simply helping them socially integrate into a university as Tinto believed (Guiffrida, 2006). Guiffrida's (2006) study is important because it

connected to Harper's (2006) study that highlights the connection between a Black male student's academic and personal retention efforts and the ways in which HEIs can aid in the development of those connections.

Harper follows up his 2006 study on peer support for the academic achievement of African American males with an additional study, published in 2007. Harper's 2007 study took place at the same 6 PWIs institutions in the Midwest as his 2006 study took place. Thirty-two undergraduate Black male students were selected to participate in the study using in 2 to 3 hour in-person interviews followed up by phone interviews (Harper, 2007). In this study, Harper cites research studies that identify identity development as a reason for early college departures for Black males (Harper, 2007). Harper investigated if the expression of identity among Black male students factored into their perceptions of being supported at the college. Harper cited Williams Cross' 1971 model on Black racial identity development which highlights the importance of the expression of racial identity as a contributing factor to psychosocial wellness (Harper, 2007). Harper relied on (Helms et al., 1991) definition of racial identity as a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular group (Helms et al., 1991)

The results of Harper's (2007) study indicated that many students who participated in the study focused on racial uplift as one reason why they participated in Black student organizations as well as trying to provide a space to support student academically and socially on campus (Harper, 2007). In his research study, racial uplift was defined as the pride African American male students felt in being able to advocate for the needs of other Black male students on campus. Students leveraged their affiliation with the Black student organizations to gain access to administrators at the PWI institutions to discuss issues important to African American male

students by going to administrators for funding for Black male initiatives, who saw them as student ambassadors (Harper,2007,p135) Harper discussed how engagement in social justice and racial uplift were the primary ways in which Black males embraced their racial identity and aligned with William Cross (1971) model which discussed how internalization is an important stage of Black racial identity development because a person becomes intimately aware of their racial identity (Harper, 2007). Harper (2007) validates the research of Rendon (1994), Tierney (1999) because he demonstrates a connection between the role of the institution in providing support for Black male students through student organization leadership opportunities and how these opportunities for leadership and racial uplift serve to validate the experience of Black male students, which allows them to feel supported on campus and aids them in their persistence journey. It is important to note that Harper's study demonstrates that the identity development of Black male students can be considered a strength in their persistence journey in contrast to earlier research studies in this literature review which highlighted the need for students to abandon their identity to acclimate fully to the college or university.

Harper (2007) discussed the way internalization can play an important role in Black racial identity development which can aid in persistence. Cross (1971) describes internalization as when a person accepts definitions of their identity from outside sources. Cross (1971) explains that internalization can be positive if ideas of racial pride and increased self-esteem are internalized but can be negative if ideas of self-doubt and inferiority are internalized. Smith et al (2007) work directly ties into Harper's 2007 article because it investigated the ways in which Black male college students' experiences involving micro-aggressions, stereotyping, and profiling could cause psychological stress (Smith et al.,2007).

Smith et al. (2007) connects to Harper's (2007) research study because it provided a chance to investigate what can happen if Black men internalized notions of inferiority and self-doubt because of negative racial experiences. If peer support and student organizations can help increase a Black male student's sense of belonging and increase an awareness of their identity, constantly negative college experiences can lead to a loss of a sense of belonging which could lead to decreased persistence among Black males at colleges and universities. In Smith et al. (2007) research study, thirty-eight male students at Harvard University, Michigan State University, University of California Berkely, University of Illinois, and University of Michigan participated in focus group interviews. The students discussed their experiences of racial micro-aggressions based on stereotypes that expressed themselves in hyper-surveillance and control in campus social, academic, and public spaces (Smith et al.,2007). Black students were defined as being "out of place" and "fitting the description" of Black males who were not part of the campus community (Smith et al.,2007). In response to the micro-aggressions experienced on campus, students experienced frustration, anger, shock, disappointment, hopelessness, and fear.

Smith et al. (2007) work directly ties into Harper's 2007 article because it focuses on the ways in which Black male college students' experiences with microaggressions, stereotyping, and profiling can cause psychological stress. If peer support and student organizations can help increase a Black male student's sense of belonging and increase an awareness of their identity, negative college experiences can lead to a loss of a sense of belonging, which could lead to decreased persistence among Black males attending colleges and universities. The students discussed their experiences of racial micro-aggressions based on stereotypes that expressed themselves in hyper-surveillance and control in campus social, academic, and public spaces

(Smith et al.,2007). In response to the micro-aggressions experienced on campus, students experienced frustration, anger, shock, disappointment, hopelessness, and fear.

Smith (2004) coined the term racial battle fatigue to describe the psychological and physiological reactions of Black people to daily racial encounters. Racial Battle fatigue as a term derives its origins from research literature on combat stress syndrome, combat trauma, and post-traumatic stress disorder to understand the effect of a hostile environment on an individual (Pierce;1975a, 1995; Shay, 2002; Shay & Monroe,1999; Smith 2004, U.S Department of the Army, 1994; Willie & Stanford, 1995). According to Smith (2004), the psychological symptoms of racial battle fatigue are depression, anxiety, sudden changes in mood, hopelessness, fear, apathy and irritability. The physiological symptoms of racial battle fatigue are chest pain, shortness of breath, insomnia, high blood pressure, pounding heart and intestinal problems. Smith et al. (2007) found that despite coping strategies, Black males that experienced racial battle fatigue often had repressed levels of frustration and higher “slow-out” or dropout rates. The students overcome racial battle fatigue by establishing safe spaces on campus and creating affinity groups where they could discuss the common issues with racism and discrimination they experienced on campus. Smith et al. (2007) study is important because it demonstrates an important relationship between Black male student experiences, a student’s sense of belonging on campus and the campus environment. It is worth noting Smith et al. (2007) research study confirmed the research of Kuh &Love (2000). Roach (2001), Harper (2006), Harper (2007), who found the important role that coping strategies of Black male students utilize such as peer support and peer bonding can be important in assisting Black males in their persistence journey.

Hotchkiss & Dansby (2015) used a 3-dimensional narrative inquiry method to explore the stories of 4 Black male student leaders in PWIs located at 4 public and private universities in the

U.S. The 3-dimensional narrative inquiry process focused on participants interactions, past, present, and future and place to retell their narrative in chronological order. The participants participated in 12 student organizations at the PWIs, held 17 positions, with 6 being elected and 11 being appointed. The authors interviewed student leaders experiencing racial battle fatigue while leading the student organizations. Each open-ended interview lasted 60-90 minutes with weekly descriptive journals detailing leadership experiences and the frequency of perceived race related interactions, six observations of participants during organizational meetings and stories about racial family socialization were used for data gathering purposes. The researchers investigated how the effect of cumulative racial stressors influenced college persistence. The researchers used the definition of racial battle fatigue defined by Smith et al. (2007) which stated that “racial battle fatigue is a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing racism daily” (p.180) The authors used the definition of micro-aggressions as developed by Sue et al. (2007) which describes micro-aggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights toward people of color” (p.271). The authors found that the leaders experienced cumulative effects of racial battle fatigue. The psychological effects of racial battle fatigue displayed by Black male student leaders during the study were anger, feelings of revenge, nervousness, and discouragement. Black male student leaders experienced the behavioral effects of racial battle fatigue including emotional detachment, growing hatred, questioning self-worth, and employing escapism. The physiological effects of racial battle fatigue demonstrated by Black male student leaders during the study were memory loss, sudden depression, crying and sleeplessness. The authors found that the student leaders employed the persistence strategies of avoiding persons who they perceived as racial

threat. Participants also aligned themselves with White people who were aligned with the interest of the students. This study was important because it helped to confirm Smith's (2007) study and the notion that racial battle fatigue can affect Black male students in ways that can harm their persistence and institutions have a duty to understand what situations, processes or policies on campus could be causing racial battle fatigue for Black male students.

Black Male Experiences at HSIs

As noted in Chapter 1, the type of institution a Black male student attends can have a profound impact on their ability to persist in college due to the way in which attributes of the campus culture and climate can enhance or detract from the sense of belonging of a Black male student, which can ultimately affect their persistence (Strayhorn, 2012). Minority serving institutions (MSIs), which include HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Asian and Pacific Island Institutions (AANAPISIs), have a reputation of being dedicated to the service of first generation, low-income, minority students (Harmon, 2012). MSIs have a reputation of assisting in the increasing of students' self-esteem and cultural identities in ways that PWIs do not (Harmon, 2012)

However, research studies investigating Black male experiences at HSIs are limited and most research studies were conducted within the last 12 years. The research studies on Black male experiences at HSIs often have results that vary in terms of the suitability of HSIs for aiding the persistence of Black male students and the alignment of the HSIs' retention strategies with the ways that Black male students persist. One of the earliest research studies about Black male student experiences at an HSI was written by Reddick (2012). Reddick investigated the experiences of a group of Black male students at a college in Texas. The researcher found that many students at the college were unaware of the college's status as an HSI and described

experiences that were similar to Black male experiences at a PWI in that the Black male students experienced multiple instances of micro-aggression and stereotypes. Reddick also found that Black males created their own support community for each other and incorporated the assistance of faculty who they saw as allies into their community. This research study is important because it highlights the ways in which Black male students respond to racialized environments that they encounter through the forming of their own community.

Hargrove (2014) used a qualitative narrative inquiry-based research method to investigate the experiences of Black male upper classmen and recent graduates of an HSI. Hargrove conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 Black males at Weaver State University (WSU), which qualified as a MSI and an HSI). The researcher interviewed Black male students about their ability to be resilient when confronted with challenges to persistence at WSU. The Black male students interviewed in the study experienced a fractured sense of belonging at WSU during their initial years attending the college and considered stopping out. Many participants experienced significant financial difficulties, which threatened their persistence at WSU, and felt besieged by constantly fending off negative stereotypes, which led to mental health issues. To cope with the barriers to persistence at WSU, participants used self-efficacy to overcome challenges encountered during their first years in college, which included rampant racism, microaggressions, and the experience of being stereotyped as not intelligent by faculty members.

Many participants stated that they were “determined” to succeed and wanted a “better life.” Participants identified a strong support system that included family, peers, community members, WSU faculty, and staff (Hargrove, 2014). Participants cited the belief in them that was demonstrated by members of the WSU community who encouraged their success by holding them accountable when they did not meet the expectations the participants set for themselves.

Hargrove's (2014) study was important because, although it demonstrates that Black male students at HSIs experience similar hostile racial environments encountered by Black male students at PWIs, the researcher identified the ways in which HSIs can serve as partners in Black male persistence when institutional support and resources are consistently leveraged.

Brooms (2023a) conducted a mixed methods research study at an urban HSI located in the Southwest region of the United States. Brooms interviewed 16 full time Black male students about their family backgrounds, experiences before college, their motivations for going to college, and academic and social experiences in college. The researcher found that Black male students attended the HSI due to the diversity found there. Black male students also chose to attend the HSI because of their family dynamic and the location of the college in relation to their family. Black male students noticed the low number of enrolled Black male students on campus, and many felt pressure to prove themselves on campus due to society's characterization of Black men (Brooms, 2023a). The students felt that the institutional culture, specifically, interpersonal interactions with other students, staff, and faculty on campus, were not welcoming and were different than their initial thoughts and impressions. Students identified a variety of personal, familial, and institutional factors that helped them continue in college. Brooms' mixed methods research study is important for the understanding the experiences of Black males at HSIs because it illustrates the ways in which an HSI must be aware of the experiences of Black male students at the institution and work to amplify characteristics of the HSI environment to support Black male persistence. The next section includes an investigation of Black male student experiences and their social support systems.

Black Male Student Experiences and Social Support Systems

Social support systems related to Black male student persistence can be defined as

institutions, individuals, groups, or programs that assist Black males in the completion of a college degree (Brooms & Davis, 2017). The elements of social support for Black males related to their persistence in college can be divided into institutional support, personal supportive relationships, and familial support (Brooms, 2019). Institutional support refers to affinity groups, student organizations, Black Male Initiatives (BMI), and mentoring programs that are offered by the HEI. Personal supportive relationships refer to friends, peers on campus, relationships with faculty or other college staff at the HEI (Brooms, 2019). Familial support refers to the support of family and the student's home community (Brooms, 2019). The following sections highlights the ways that each form of Black male social support: institutional support, personal supportive relationships, familial support, affects Black male retention and persistence. It is important to understand that not all Black male students persist in the same way so Black male retention strategies at colleges and universities must align their Black male retention strategies to the ways in which students at their institution persist.

Institutional Support

Harper (2015) discussed the various strategies Black males uses to persist, despite academically and psychologically damaging stereotypes being present on the campuses they attend. Harper focused on literature that documented the stereotypes that Black men face on college campuses, which include constantly validating intellectual abilities, inappropriate comments about their appearance, and assumptions about Black males needing remediation. The author discussed past researchers, such as Smith et al. (2007) documentation of "racial battle fatigue" and the effect it has on Black men that fight racist institutional norms, as well as stereotypes that they must dispel (Harper, 2015). Harper focused on the positive ways

that Black men responded to racist stereotypes.

Harper (2015) interviewed 143 Black male achievers at 30 White colleges and universities using data from the National Black Male College Achievement Study. The researcher sought Black men that had a 3.0 GPA, lengthy records of leadership and engagement in multiple student organizations, meaningful relationships with campus administrators and faculty outside the classroom, and who participated in enriching educational experiences such as service learning or summer research (Harper, 2015). Harper (2015) visited 30 campuses and conducted 2–3-hour interviews. Harper's interviews were semi-structured to allow participants to reflect on experiences that were significant to them.

Harper (2015) found that Black men resisted racial stereotypes and persisted through engagement and leadership and that stereotypes ignited activism among Black men in his study. The students reported that as they became more engaged in the campus community through organizations and clubs, they became more empowered to speak up against racist stereotypes (Harper, 2015). Harper (2015) found that one of the reasons students were empowered to speak out about racist stereotypes was that they thought their engagement in campus community served as direct repudiation of stereotypes about their intelligence, demeanor and academic ability. Harper found that many students who did not engage in the campus community often were hesitant due to previous racialized experiences and looked to Black male students in leadership positions to model effective ways of engaging with others in the campus community (Harper, 2015). Some students resisted racial stereotypes by forming meaningful relationships with other Black students on campus (Harper, 2015).

Barker and Avery (2012) discussed the impact of Black male leadership initiatives on the engagement and persistence of Black males and conducted semi-structured focus

group interviews with eight Black males participating in a Black male leadership program at a large PWI in the southern United States. The leadership program was a two-year cohort program designed to provide Black college males with experiences that would enhance their academic, leadership, civic and cultural development. Participants attended workshops, seminars, social events, performed community service and met with mentors across the campus. Faculty and staff at the HEI nominated students for participation in the program but students could also apply. Black male students participating in the program were rising sophomores or rising juniors with varying levels of academic and social engagement. Data was collected in two focus groups; one sophomore focus group and one junior focus group with each semi-structured focus group interview lasting 45 to 60 minutes. Barker and Avery found that the Black males who participated in the program felt appreciated, valued, and supported. Students that were nominated to participate in the program felt honored and highly regarded by their faculty and advisors. Students felt that others on campus cared about their well-being by nominating them to the program and that the program helped them build relationships, increase their level of engagement, and gain access to resources and information. Students also reported peer connections and the development of campus relationships.

Brewster and Ashley (2019) studied the relationship between self-efficacy, student engagement, mentoring, and retention of Black males. In their study, 770 male Black male undergraduate students at an urban southeastern PWI in the United States were selected to participate in a survey that contained 31 open-ended and close-ended questions administered through Qualtrics. Participants were selected through random sampling and stratified sampling. Participants answered questions about demographics, self-efficacy, student

engagement, mentoring, and general attitudes about college. Brewster and Ashley (2019) found that mentoring offered at the PWI was wanted by the Black male students and correlated highly with student engagement, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes about college. The studies summarized in this section illustrate the responsibility of HEIs to offer and revise institutional supports to meet the evolving needs of Black male college students. The researchers also emphasized the importance of the campus environment for effective institutional support as well as the role of college faculty and staff in the construction of a supportive environment for Black male students.

Personal Supportive Relationships

Brooms and Davis (2017) discussed support systems that Black males use to persist in college and researched the collegiate experiences of 59 Black males at three different historically White institutions to understand how these students constructed meaning from their collegiate experiences and their efforts for educational success. The participants were recruited using convenience sampling. Participants were from urban cities and were between the ages of 19 and 35. Data was collected through one semi-structured interview lasting between 45 and 150 minutes. Brooms and Davis explicitly investigated the roles that relationships played in the student's persistence efforts.

The consistent theme that emerged from Brooms and Davis' (2017) study was that Black men on campus had to "stick together." The researchers found that some of the participants did not fully integrate into the dominant college culture and remained integrated in their subculture as a means of coping with the stresses of feeling alienated and segregated. Students also credited the mentoring of Black faculty at their institutions for making sure they were "focused on the goal." The students in this study described anecdotal

recollections of the ways in which Black male faculty would check on the progress of Black male students. Students described receiving support from their peers to combat racism on campus. The students reported forming a college within a college and relying upon other Black students for resources, support, and bonding. Students also connected through fraternities and other male centered programming. The students reported that connecting with peers assisted in their persistence, as many of their peers had the same goals.

Rotich (2022) investigated Black male students' perceptions of their success as well as which factors contributed to Black male persistence in college and graduating from college. The researcher used a narrative inquiry research design and conducted interviews with six Black male students between February 2020 and October 2021 at Metropolitan State University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The interviews were conducted in person when possible or via zoom due to the pandemic occurring during this time. The researcher used a purposefully sampling technique of Black males that graduated from college due to wanting to investigate the barriers that these Black males overcame on their way to graduating.

Rotich (2022) found that some of the Black males felt a lack of support from people during their college careers, specifically role models, advisors and friends guiding them through the college process. Some Black male students suffered from a lack of belonging and in some situations felt that college professionals were there to deter them from finishing college. In contrast, other Black male students received support from college friends who shared resources and played a role in their day-to-day active environment. Some of the Black male students also served as mentors for other students at the college and indicated that they "kinda stuck together" to overcome any barriers to persisting that they faced.

Brooms and Davis' (2017) and Rotich's (2022) studies are important because they

illustrate a different way that Black male students persist in college. The research studies reviewed in this section indicate how important personal supportive relationships can be for the persistence of Black males and how a lack of personal supportive relationships can contribute to a lack of engagement, sense of belonging, and value for Black male students. In the next section, the role of familial support in the persistence of Black males in college is discussed.

Familial Support

Goodwill et al. (2022) discussed factors that support or impede the academic success and psychological well-being of Black men. The researchers investigated from whom Black men receive social support and what circumstances or events required social support for Black men (Goodwill et al., 2022). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 Black men at a large PWI in the United States (Goodwill et al., 2022). Participants were 18-30 years of age and were recruited through the multicultural center at the university, attending campus events geared toward Black students, and sending emails through the university registrar. The researchers used snowball sampling, as some participants encouraged family and friends to participate in the study. Twelve interviews were conducted in person and 15 were conducted using videoconferencing software. The interviews each lasted 30 minutes and each participant received \$15 for participating in the study. The results indicated that Black men received social support from peers, campus student groups, fraternities, and family members, specifically the women in their lives such as their mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and female friends (Goodwill et al., 2022). The participants also reported receiving support from former high school coaches.

Smith (2022) investigated the role of family and community cultural networks in the

persistence of Black male engineers in college. Thirteen Black male students majoring in engineering were interviewed in focus groups at two PWI's located in different regions of the United States. The researcher utilized a purposeful sampling technique using relationships that had been developed with university officers and administrators who had reputations for supporting minoritized undergraduate students (Tolbert, 2022). The participants were all nineteen or older who identified as Black male students with one student also identifying as Hispanic. The results indicated the role of the Black male student's family members, extended family members and members of the Black male student's community in encouraging their engineering learning and development (Tolbert, 2022). Family members provided advice on how to successfully navigate through society, specifically in a school setting. Black male participants reported that their families gave advice on "being selfish" and making sure that the students prioritized their educational goals over other distractions (Tolbert, 2022). Black male students also reported receiving the advice to go "above and beyond" or oppose the stereotypical expectations of Black men's low performance and aptitude. Black male student parents taught students how to respond when they were confronted with situations where they would not be given a fair chance because of their race. Some parents in the study introduced their Black male sons to Black engineers expanding the Black male students professional and social network which provided Black male students with additional social support in their persistence journey.

Goodwill et al. (2022) and Tolbert (2022) highlighted the important role a student's familial support system can play in the persistence of Black male students. Specifically, a Black male student's familial network can help with students' intrinsic motivation to succeed as well as time management, setting personal and professional goals, and responses

to racial discrimination that Black male students may face on college campuses. In the next section, how sense of belonging can affect the persistence of Black males in college is discussed.

Sense of Belonging

Strayhorn (2012) described a sense of belonging as a student's perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling care about, accepted, respected, valued by and important to the campus community or others on campus. such as faculty, staff, and peers. Strayhorn further defined sense of belonging as a basic human need and motivation sufficient to influence behavior. Researchers found that a sense of belonging positively influences academic achievement, retention, and persistence (Hausman et al., 2007; Rhee, 2008). Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs demonstrates that until the need to belong is satisfied, other higher order needs such as innovation, creativity, and self-actualization (reaching one's full potential) may be pushed to the background. Sense of belonging is uniquely tied to most retention and persistence models due to retention and potential models focusing on social and academic integration (Hausman et al., 2007). According to Hausman et al. (2007), a student that does not develop a sense of belonging at a college or university will have a challenging time integrating into the social and academic life of the college.

Strayhorn (2012) described a lack of a sense of belonging as alienation, social isolationism, loneliness and marginality or otherness. Strayhorn (2012) discussed that a lack of sense of belonging negatively affected identity and persistence. In the next section, a sense of belonging for Black male students and how a sense of belonging affects their retention and persistence are discussed.

Black Male Student Sense of Belonging

Strayhorn (2012) conducted a secondary analysis of data from a national sample of 554 Black college student responses obtained from the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) that measured the quality and quantity of students' involvement in college activities and their use of college facilities. Strayhorn found that students that developed mentoring relationships with faculty members increased their sense of belonging on campus. The author noted that Black male students who reported a stronger sense of belonging on college campuses tended to perform better than those that did not. The researcher also found that Black male students increased their sense of belonging by participating in leadership activities, mentoring programs, peer mentoring programs and participating in summer enrichment activities. Strayhorn's study is important because it illustrated how the institution could help students persist by helping to create a college environment that was welcoming and helped Black men feel *connected* to the campus in positive ways.

Brooms (2019) used a mixed methods study to understand the bonding and learning experiences of 65 first-generation, working-class background Black male students from different academic levels and their meaning making from engagement in Black Male Initiatives (BMI). The researcher explored student experiences in the BMI at 3 different universities, one in a rural part of the United States and two in urban centers of the United States. Brooms used semi-structured open-ended interviews to understand student experiences. The BMI programs at these universities focused on Black male students transition from high school to college, their personal development, increasing retention and graduation of Black male students as well as their academic and social cohesion (Brooms,

2019). Students participated in their BMI programs between one semester and 4 years (Brooms, 2019). Brooms showed that Black men found that connecting with other Black men on campus provided them with interpersonal support, a chance to reflect on their identities and experiences and create a brotherhood. Brooms also demonstrated that Black male students expressed that the program influenced the way that they thought about manhood and masculinity. Another finding was that the BMI program helped increase the students' sense of belonging on the college campus. Brooms' study is important because it demonstrates the importance of how a retention strategy (BMI) can help Black male students persist in college and increase a sense of belonging on the college campus for Black men. In the next section, I will discuss the theoretical framework for this research study.

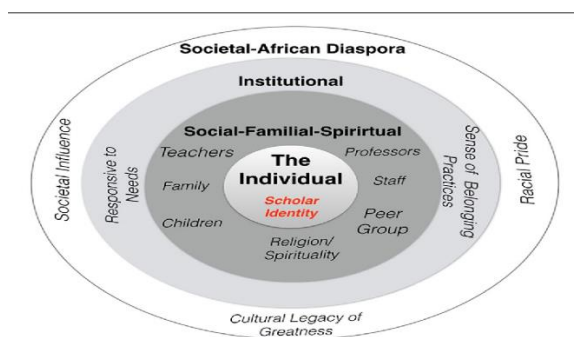
Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory (BMALST)

The theoretical framework that I will use to address a possible lack of congruence between Northsun University staff and Black male student perceptions of retention initiatives is the Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory (BMALST) developed by Goings (Goings, 2021). In his article entitled *Introducing the Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory* (2021), Goings acknowledges that there has been a preponderance of deficit-oriented discourse about Black males and Black Male Adult learners that does not fully encapsulate the success of Black Male Adult Learners. Goings theorized that current researchers are focusing on the Black males that leave college instead of those that come back to college later to finish their degree but with additional responsibilities. Goings defines adult learners as Black collegians older than 25 who have the following characteristics: delayed enrollment in college, attending college part-time, having financial independence, working full-time while taking classes, responsible for

dependents other than spouse, a single parent, or obtaining a high school diploma through an alternative route (Goings, 2021, p159). Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory (BMALST) (Goings, 2021) was developed as a lens to examine the unique experiences of Black male adult learners in higher education and the impact of their various environments on their academic success. At the core of Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory (BMALST) is a belief that Black male adult learners succeed in higher education due to individual characteristics and environmental influences. Specifically, Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory (BMALST) assumes that Black male adult learners develop a scholar identity that influences their success and that Black Male adult learners social-familial-spiritual, institutional, and African diaspora environments influence the development of their scholar identity and ultimately their academic success. A representation of Goings BMALST theory is shown in Figure 1 (Appendix D) below:

Figure 1

Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory (BMALST)



Note: from Goings, Ramon (2021) Introducing the Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory. Reproduced with permission from author.

As one can see from Figure 1 above, there are a variety of factors that affect the success of Black male adult learners with the Social-Familial-Spiritual factors having the greatest effect on the success of Black male adult learners (Goings, 2021). The Black Male Adult Learner

Success Theory (BMALST) (Goings, 2021) builds upon Whiting's Scholar Identity Model (2014) and Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological system theory (Goings, 2021). The Scholar Identity Model (SIM) (Whiting, 2014) was originally developed to support K-12 educators in cultivating the academic gifts of Black males in schools. Whiting (2014) defines the scholar identity model as African American males perceiving themselves as academicians, as studious, as intelligent, or talented in school settings. Whiting developed 7 components of the SIM as 1) self-efficacy, 2) willing to make sacrifices, 3) internal locus of control, 4) future-oriented, 5) self-awareness, 6) need for achievement, 7) academic self-confidence, 8) racial pride, 9) masculinity (Whiting, 2014). Goings claimed that Black males developed a scholar identity at different times in their academic journey (Goings, 2021)

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) states that "Seldom is attention paid to the person's behavior in more than one setting or to the way in which relations between settings can affect what happened to them" (Bronfenbrenner, p18, 1979). Goings (2021) uses Bronfenbrenner's theory to highlight the interconnectedness of an individual's various environment that influences their behavior (Goings, 2021). Goings (2021) believe that the Institutional Environment captures the spaces and place on campus that influence Black male adult learners (Goings, 2021) Goings believe that educational institutions must take ownership in supporting Black male adult learners (Goings, 2021). Specifically, Goings believed that institutions should provide resources to Black male adult learners (daycare, flexible class scheduling) along with caring professionals who embrace the students Blackness and maleness (Goings, 2021). Goings defined the societal African Diaspora Environment captures the ways in which societal views of Black men in higher education and society at large affect how they are perceived on campus and how they perceived

the world as well as the role racial pride plays in motivating Black males to succeed (Goings, 2021).

For the purposes of this dissertation, there will be an application of Goings Black Male Adult Learner Success theory (BMALST) to traditional Black male students because the theory helps to encapsulate 30 years of research on how Black men can succeed in college and helps to connect the role of the educational institution to the individual persistence strategies of Black males. Specifically, there will be a focus on the connection between the Scholar Identity Model part of the BMALST model and its connection to the Institutional Environment and Societal African Diaspora part of the model. In this dissertation, the Scholar Identity Model will represent the ways in which individual Black males persist in college. The Institutional Environment for this dissertation will represent the ways in which the Institution's Black male retention initiatives, campus organizations and campus environment work together to support the persistence strategies of Black males or to use the term that Goings uses in his description of the BMALST model, the ways in which the Black male retention initiatives, campus organization, and campus environments interconnect with individual Black male persistence strategies. Finally, Societal African Diaspora will represent the importance of building cultural affinity groups on campus to celebrate the culture of Black males and to help form bonds that will assist Black males in persisting in college, the importance of which were illustrated in the studies of Kuh (2004), Harper (2006, 2012), and Goings (2018).

Summary

This chapter included a discussion of early persistence and retention models, the ways that students persist, and the roles that HEIs play in students persisting. There was a discussion of how early persistence and retention models did not focus on the collaborative role of students

and the institution regarding persistence. Early persistence and retention models did not consider the ways in which minority students persisted in college. Rendon's (1994) research was an inflection point for research studies on Black male retention due its focus on the role an institution can play in validating the experiences of identity and minority students, which can lead to an increased sense of belonging and aid in the persistence of minority students. The ways in which the type of institution a Black male student chooses to attend can affect their persistence and retention was also discussed. It was discovered from the limited research studies on Black male student experiences at HSIs, that many HSIs function as PWIs in terms of racialized negative experiences for Black male students but that institutional support for Black males through peers and members of an HSI community can help Black males persist despite challenges to persistence encountered at the HSI. There was a discussion of the experiences of Black male students and how students require resources and supports aligned with their experiences. Finally, there was a discussion of how the researcher used Goings' (2021) BMALST theory in the study with a focus on the collaborative relationship, alignment, and interconnections among the various factors that influence Black male persistence and retention.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to investigate the relationships between the retention initiatives of Northsun University, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in the Midwest and the persistence strategies of Black men at Northsun University. Specifically, this study investigated if Black male students' perceptions of the effectiveness of Black male retention initiatives show an alignment, congruence, and interconnectedness with the effectiveness of Black male retention initiatives as perceived by staff at Northsun University. The research study site and designation as an HSI was important in this research study due to the dichotomy presented in Chapter 1 and 2 regarding the reputation of HSIs as supportive to the needs of minority students, but the experiences of Black male students as investigated by multiple researchers in the past 12 years not matching the representation of HSIs as nurturing environments for students of color (Brooms, 2021a). The designation of the research site as an HSI was important due to its eligibility to receive Title V grant money from the federal government that was targeted toward Hispanic student support programs that the institution received because of this designation (Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions Program, 2024). This research study contributed to the broader understanding of Black male experiences at HSIs through a discussion of the way HSIs' campus climate can be aligned to the needs of Black males attempting to persist in college. This study also investigated if Black male retention initiatives at Northsun University included Black male voices in a way that aligns, is congruent with or interconnects with the persistence strategies that Black males used to persist in college. This study included semi-structured interviews to gain a better understanding of the study participants' experiences. The researcher answered the following research questions:

1. What are some of the coping strategies and support systems used by current Black male students who have persisted at this HSI?
2. To what degree do current retention strategies used by the HSI reflect, align, and interconnect with the persistence strategies, lived experiences and historical institutionalized barriers to persistence experienced by Black male students?

This chapter includes a discussion of the research study site, the methodology for this study, the study design, selection of study participants, data collection procedures and analysis, study limitations, and researcher positionality.

Research Study Site

Given the goal of focusing on the real world, meaning-making processes for participants in this study, the research study site was important for the data collection phase of this study. The study site was chosen due to its history of supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives on campus, including opening an office exclusively dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The office is dedicated to diversity, equity and inclusion focused on developing programming such as affinity groups, academic support networks, mentorship opportunities and social events for students of color. The office also processed any complaints related to diversity, equity and inclusion at the institution.

Research Methodology and Study Design

This study examined the lived experiences of Black male students at Northsun University, how these lived experiences informed their persistence at Northsun University, and their perceptions of the retention efforts made by Northsun University. This study applied a phenomenological research method. Creswell (2009) defined phenomenology as a research strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a

phenomenon as described by participants. Moustakas (1994) described phenomenology as “seeking meaning from appearances” and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understanding (p. 58). Moustakas also described phenomenology as involving a small number of subjects studied through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships through meaning. Similarly, Cilesiz (2010) described the purpose of phenomenological studies as reaching the essence of the individual’s lived experience of the phenomenon while ascertaining and defining the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) indicated how phenomenological research requires a homogenous group of participants. As a result, according to Creswell (2014), study participants in a phenomenological study should have experience with the same phenomenon. The rationale behind phenomenology as the research design for this study was grounded in the goal of identifying patterns and commonalities in the experiences of research participants from which conclusions can be drawn. For this research study, six Black male participants were asked questions in a semi-structured interview to understand their lived experiences as Black males at Northsun University.

Similarly, six staff at this institution were asked about the processes they used to arrive at what was needed to support Black male students’ persistence at their institution. The staff semi-structured interviews examined patterns and commonalities in the thought processes of the staff about retention strategies needed to support Black male students. Both staff and students were asked to consciously reflect on the ways that support systems influence persistence as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of Northsun University’s Black male retention initiatives. The main reason that staff were interviewed in this research study was that in some instances, staff at HEIs may make decisions that affect the retention of Black male students and may make

these decisions in isolation without feedback from various stakeholders in Black male retention and persistence. Staff may not be receiving the feedback they need to align the retention strategies of the institution with the persistence methods of Black male students. The perspective of staff in this study was crucial to the formation of a partnership with students that can enhance a collaborative approach to Black male persistence and retention.

Semi-structured interviews rely on asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework (George, 2022). Semi-structured interviews are open-ended and allow flexibility for follow-up questions to further explore participant responses, clarifications, and elaboration if needed (George, 2022) Semi-structured interview responses can be comparable and are important for generating comparisons between respondents. Considering the need to compare the responses of Black male students and Northsun University staff, this research design was appropriate. An unstructured interview in this study would have resulted in the researcher having difficulty with effectively categorizing the data. Similarly, a completely structured interview would not have allowed for participants' unique experiences and thoughts to be recorded.

Participant Selection

The participants in this study included six Black male students between the ages of 18 and 30 at Northsun University and six staff participants at Northsun University. The selection criteria for Black male participants included being Black and male students. Student participants also needed to be between the ages of 18 and 30. Students also needed to be enrolled at Northsun University with an academic classification of freshmen, sophomore, junior, or senior. There were two selection criteria used for the recruitment of staff participants in this research study. First, staff participants were required to have worked at Northsun University for at least six months to have gained some institutional knowledge. Second, staff participants were recruited for this study

if they worked directly with or had knowledge of Black male retention strategies at Northsun University.

Data Collection

After IRB approval, data collection began with the researcher sending a flyer with research study information to the Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion at Northsun University had her staff post the flyer around the office. Students who were interested in participating in the research study contacted the researcher by email. Staff at Northsun University who had first expressed interest to the Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion were contacted directly by email. The researcher sent a recruitment email response containing a link to a Google Form Survey to students who had first contacted the researcher by email or to staff who had first expressed interest to the Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

The Google Form survey assessed that the students or staff matched the criteria to participate in the study. The Google Form survey was divided into three separate parts using the Skiplogic Google app software, which prevents prospective research study participants from continuing with a survey if they do not match pre-established conditions. The first part of the Google Form survey contained questions related to the name of the participant, their affiliation with the Northsun University and questions pertaining to their age or year in school for students and the amount of time worked at Northsun University, staff position and work regarding Black male retention at Northsun University for staff participants. Students and staff who matched research study criteria could then proceed to the second part of the Google Form survey which contained an informed consent form. This informed consent form described the purpose of the

study, risks and benefits of participating, and included other information needed to help a potential participant decide if they wanted to participate in the study.

Students and staff who indicated consent could then proceed to the third part of the Google Form survey which contained the Calendly scheduling app through which research study participants could schedule research study interview dates and times. The scheduled time and date chosen by the research study participants was automatically sent to an email address that they provided. Students and staff who did not match the research study criteria of being a Black male student or having worked for Northsun University for at least 6 months or did not indicate consent, were automatically exited out of the Google Form survey with no information saved. The design of the Google Form survey was intended to make sure that only qualified participants were able to participate in the research study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Black male students and six staff at Northsun University. Follow-up interviews were offered to participants, but no participant completed a follow-up interview. The interviews included 13 interview questions for students to understand the students' personal and academic background, social support systems, methods of persisting in college, and thoughts about the effectiveness of current Black male retention initiatives used at the university. The staff interviews included 13 interview questions to understand the staffs' personal and professional background, their role at the university, their role in assisting Black male students at the university, and the amount of input Black male students had in the design of Black male retention initiatives. Finally, with the interview questions, the researcher sought to understand the staffs' perception of the effectiveness of Black male retention initiatives.

Black male participants were compensated for their participation in the study and received a \$25 gift card to Amazon or Walmart. Staff participants in the study were not compensated for their time. The participating students and staff were assigned a pseudonym to preserve confidentiality and encourage candid discussions during the interviews. Each student participant received an identical set of open-ended questions, which provided an opportunity for them to answer follow-up questions. Each staff participant also received an identical set of open-ended questions that also provided them with an opportunity to answer follow-up questions.

The semi-structured interviews were completed according to an interview protocol the researcher developed. The interview protocol asked students to answer questions that ranged from biographical information to specific information about their lived experiences before and during college, and their thoughts about the effectiveness of retention strategies at the college. Similarly, staff interviews asked staff to first answer biographical and professional experience questions and then specific questions about their role at the college, their role in developing Black male retention initiatives, and their thoughts about the effectiveness of Black male retention initiatives.

Interview Protocols and Questions

The interview protocol for students included an explanation that the interview questions sought to understand the experiences of students as they persist in college as well as understand some of the challenges students face as they persist in college. The interview protocol for staff included an explanation that the researcher sought to understand how the university assisted students with persisting in college and there was no evaluation of the ways in which the university assisted Black male students. At the start of each staff or student zoom interview, the researcher explained the protocol and mentioned the purpose of the research study, the type of

questions that would be asked during the interview, the interview would be recorded, voluntary and could be stopped at any time if the questions made the participant uncomfortable in any way. The researcher then asked for permission to begin the interview.

Data Security

Zoom interviews were held and recorded at dates and times that were convenient for research participants. All recorded interviews will be stored on a removable storage device with an encrypted password for three years and then deleted. Access to this data was limited to the researcher. The handwritten notes taken for the interview were scanned and immediately shredded. Eventually all data will be destroyed three years after the conclusion of this study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this research study began with the researcher viewing the interviews of the participants three times to completely understand the experiences and thoughts of the participants in their own words before their experiences were interpreted. Next, interviews were transcribed for coding. Interview notes were aligned with transcriptions. After the interviews were transcribed, the coding process began using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis stresses participants, feelings, perceptions, and experiences subjectively (Chang et al., 2021). Thematic analysis also seeks to analyze themes from a text by analyzing word and sentence structure (Chang et al., 2021). The reason why the data analysis began with an objective review of the data before interpretations were made was ensure the researcher did not impose his conceptions about the topic and lived experiences of the participants that could have affected interpretation of the data (Sundler et al., 2018).

The coding process for this research study relied on inductive coding, an approach that allows for a researcher to derive codes from the data (Saldana, 2009). Inductive coding does not

involve starting with preconceived notions of what the codes should be (Saldana, 2009). Given the nature of this research study, which relied on the experiences of the study participants to assign meaning to the phenomenon of Black male student persistence, it was important that the coding process allowed the raw research data to drive the study. In the first round of coding, qualitative data were analyzed and coded using In-vivo coding, which allowed coding based on a participant's own words and not the researcher's interpretation (Saldana, 2009). As a result, in this first round of coding, there was a search for meaning in the participants' lived experiences. Meanings were marked and similarities and differences were compared (Sundler et al., 2018). Meanings were organized into patterns. The first round of coding focused on allowing participants' own spoken language to stay as close to their intent as possible. In the second round of coding, thematic analysis coding was used to categorize patterns from the interviews into various themes that were assigned. These themes were then listed in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Initial themes were then revised until a set of main themes were identified by the researcher with a focus on keywords or phrases that appeared in initial themes.

After initial themes were identified, students and staff were sent a version of the interview transcript to ensure that their intended expression and meaning were captured. In the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, each code received a label with a description of the theme or concept that the code referred to. Each code received a date as well as how the current codes related to other codes used in the study. Finally, Microsoft Excel was used to generate a report that highlighted major themes from the students and administrators' interviews.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Stahl & King, 2020). To offset

any possible bias for the validity of this study, the researcher used member checking (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) described member checking as determining the accuracy of qualitative findings by taking the final report or specific description or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate. All participants in this study had an opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy. The validity of this study was maintained by presenting alternative explanations for patterns and themes found in the research study.

Positionality

In this study, my positionality as a Black male and former student attempting to persist in college indicates experiences that are similar to the Black male students that were studied in this research study. I have experienced instances in college where I did not feel supported by the university, did not feel that I belonged at the university, and experienced isolation that prompted thoughts of leaving the college. I experienced immediate assumptions about my academic ability from the moment I entered college from academic advisors and professionals. I persisted in college with the support of my family and a Black male faculty mentor who I met through a Black Male Initiative (BMI) program. I formed bonds with other Black males at the college. I believed in the transformative potential of Black male mentorship and was involved in many Black male mentorship programs as a high school teacher and as a member of the community in which I was raised.

As a former Black male student who attended college, I had extensive opinions on how HEIs could assist Black men in persisting in college as well as how college retention strategies aimed at Black men could be revised. For example, I participated in a retention strategy aimed at assisting Black men in persisting in college during my first year of college. As a faculty at

colleges and universities, I have also discussed retention strategies for Black men with administrators at the colleges and universities where I have taught. As a result, my personal and academic background could have affected the validity of my study. However, in this research study, I had no prior contact with the Black male students in the study. I did not discuss Black male retention strategies or retention with any of the staff and had no prior knowledge of the retention strategies that Northsun University used to assist Black males in persisting in college.

One of the main reasons I undertook this research study was I believed it was my duty to discover how Black male student retention efforts can be improved given the current low numbers of Black males persisting in colleges and universities. I did not work full time at an HEI, and believe I had more freedom to investigate the phenomenon of Black male persistence than a full-time faculty member or administrator who could be accused of having an political motive for undertaking a similar study, particularly given the current social and political atmosphere regarding diversity initiatives at colleges and universities in the United States.

Limitations and Delimitations of Study

The primary limitation of this study was the number of factors that can affect the persistence of Black males who attend college that the university cannot control. For example, the initial trust of college professionals by Black male students is a factor that cannot directly be affected by the HSI that was the focus of this study. Researchers studied the ways in which young Black males have traditionally been cautious about trusting college professionals due to being culturally stereotyped as being intellectually inferior (Rhoden, 2017). An initial degree of trust in the HSI wanting the best possible educational and personal outcome for Black male students is necessary for retention strategies aimed at Black males to work. It would be difficult

to quantify the initial amount of trust that Black male students have in the HSI's ability to act on their recommendations and validate their lived experiences.

Another limitation of this research study is there is no way of knowing the amount of funding that could be allocated towards programs targeted at Black male retention given other budgetary priorities at Northsun University. Funding for retention programs at HEIs is dependent on a variety of factors of which some may not be directly under the control of the institution. For example, funding for Higher Education was not increased in a meaningful way in the most recently passed federal budget (Knox, 2024). Increasing funding for Black male retention initiatives could lead to budgetary cuts in other areas that are also very important to the mission of a Higher Education Institution. Another limitation of this study is consideration of the ability of HEI's to meet the financial need of many Black male students as many Black male students faced job and income loss during and after the pandemic that hampered their ability to complete college (Graham, 2022). Some colleges and universities might not be able to meet the financial needs of Black male students despite efforts at implementing a robust Black male retention strategy.

One delimitation of this research study were the boundaries of the study, meaning the findings of the study were confined to the Black male students and staff interviewed at Northsun University. Black male student experiences differ depending on institutional type, geographic location, and participant characteristics. Another delimitation of this study is the amount of involvement that staff at Northsun University had on Black male retention initiatives at the institution as some staff had more involvement in retention initiatives compared to other staff at the institution.

Conclusion

The qualitative phenomenological research design method was chosen for this research study because of the capacity of this research method to obtain an understanding of the lived experiences, meaning making processes and opinions of both Black male students and staff regarding the persistence of Black males and the retention strategies at Northsun University. In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher answered the research questions focused on the persistence methods of Black males' students despite historical, social, and economic barriers to persistence and the alignment, congruence, and intersection of the persistence methods of Black males with Northsun University's Black male retention strategies.

One of the driving forces for this study was the researcher's belief that the retention crisis affecting Black male students across the country demonstrated a need for a new way of thinking about retention and persistence for Black males. The researcher hoped that consistent collaboration on retention initiatives between Black male students and administrators can lead to the development of more personalized retention plans for Black males that uniquely address the strengths that each Black male brings into college as well as the challenges that some Black males face as they persist in college despite historical, economic, and political barriers to persistence. In the following chapter, the study findings are discussed and interpreted.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This phenomenological study investigated the relationship between lived experiences, coping strategies and support systems used by current Black male students persisting in college at Northsun University and the Black male retention initiatives used by Northsun University to assist Black males in persisting. Specifically, the goal of this research study was to answer the following research questions:

1. What are some of the coping strategies and support systems used by current Black male students who have persisted at this HSI?
2. To what degree do current retention strategies used by this HSI reflect, align, and interconnect with the persistence strategies, lived experiences and historical institutionalized barriers to persistence experienced by Black male students?

To effectively address the aforementioned research questions, this chapter includes a summary of the research findings and is organized into two sections. The first section includes a discussion of the personal and academic background of the 12 research study participants and their connection with Black male persistence and retention at Northsun University as well as a discussion of data collection procedures. The second section of this chapter includes the findings with a focus on the themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews with a focus on how the responses of the research study participants contributed to the emergence of a particular theme.

Participant Demographics

This phenomenological research study included six Black male undergraduate students with an academic classification from freshmen to seniors currently attending Northsun University who self-identified through a Google Form survey. This study also included six staff

from Northsun University who worked for Northsun University in various roles and who also self-identified through a Google Form survey. All potential Black male participants met the research study criteria of being a Black male enrolled at the university between the ages of 18-30. All potential staff participants met the research study criteria of having worked for the university for at least six months and having some involvement in Black male retention at the HSI.

The 12 participants in the research study each received a pseudonym to conceal their identities and allow for the freedom necessary to discuss their experiences. The ages, academic classification, major and extracurricular activity for the Black male participants is in Table 1. In Table 1, “Rising Scholars” is the pseudonym for the affinity group for Black students at Northsun University. Rising Scholars focused on the well-being of ALL Black students at Northsun University and was not strictly focused on Black male students.

Table 1

Black Male Student Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Age	Academic Classification	Major	Extracurricular Activity
Kasion	23	Senior	Exercise Science	Rising Scholars
Dante	21	Junior	Sports Medicine Administration	Basketball, Rising Scholars, BSU
George	20	Junior	Exercise Science	Track, Resident Assistant
Samuel	20	Sophomore	Communication	Campus Ministry, Rising Scholars
Tariq	20	Junior	Computer Science	Lion Club for Computer Science Majors
Amante	19	Sophomore	Nursing	American Red Cross, Rising Scholars

Table 2 includes the names, years worked, and position of the staff research participants.

Table 2

Northsun University Staff Demographics

Pseudonym	Years at Northsun University	Position at Northsun University
Laura	20	Executive Director of Academic Student Support
Amy	10	Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Leslie	2	Director of TRIO
Solange	4	Assistant Vice President of Student Success
Katy	20	Department Chair Communications
Kevin	17	Director of Institutional Effectiveness

Data collection for this research study, which was initiated after IRB approval, started with an email to Amy, the Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) at Northsun University asking her for assistance with promoting the research study at Northsun University. Amy agreed to promote the research study through her office. Prospective student participants contacted the researcher by email and the researcher responded with an email containing a link to a Google Form survey. Administrative participants who first indicated their interest to Amy, the Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion were contacted directly via email with a link to the Google Form survey. The Google Form survey was divided into three parts. The first part of the survey asked biographical questions of prospective research study participants, the second part of the survey contained an informed consent form, and the third part of the survey contained the Calendly scheduling app

which permitted prospective research study participants to schedule a research study interview date and time. Google Skiplogic software exited prospective research study participants who did not match research study criteria or indicate consent out of the first and second parts of the form without saving any information. Once research participants scheduled an interview date and time, an email containing interview appointment information was sent to the email address the participants provided. Within two weeks, six staff participants and six Black male students had selected interview dates and times. In the next section, there is an introduction to the research participants and their personal and academic profiles. These research participant profiles are intended to provide knowledge of the wide variety of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives that research study participants brought to the study.

Black Male Student Research Participants

The 6 Black male participants in this research study were all undergraduate students at Northsun University between the ages of 18 and 23. The students had varied motivations for attending college, but each student believed that completing college was a means to achieve a goal that they had set for themselves. Each student described the challenges that they faced in persisting in college in different ways but in many areas used similar social support systems to overcome these challenges. Some students considered themselves to be high academic achievers while others admitted they struggled academically. Finally, each student cited a staff member at Northsun University that they could go to for personal or academic support.

Kasion

Kasion is a 23-year-old senior at Northsun. He majors in exercise science with a concentration in strength and conditioning. His primary reason for attending Northsun University was the amount of financial aid offered. He indicated that he would have attended trade school if

he had a chance to make a college choice again. Kasion felt that he could connect with everyone on some level and loves interacting and talking with everyone. Kasion struggled in college and worked hard to increase his grades since his sophomore year. Kasion's primary motivation for attending college is to serve as a role model for others and to have the "type of life" he wants. Kasion works as a strength and conditioning coach at a high school and wants to continue in this career path after graduation.

Dante

Dante is a 20-year-old junior in college. He majors in Sports Medicine Administration and is on the basketball team. He was also involved in the Rising Scholars program and Black Student Union (BSU) at the Northsun University. He primarily chose to attend Northsun University due to the efforts of the TRIO director in persuading him of the benefits of Northsun University for his future. He thinks that college is very expensive and would not attend Northsun University if he had to make a college choice again. His primary motivation for attending college was that he wanted to ensure that the work his family puts into making sure he has a good chance at an education does not go to waste. He does not want to disappoint his family. He plans to pursue a career in Sports Medicine Administration if his career as a basketball player does not work out.

George

George is a 20-year-old junior in college at Northsun University. He majors in exercise science and has a minor in Sports and fitness administration. He is a resident assistant at Northsun University, is on the track team, and is president of the Chess club. He also serves as a work study student at one of info desks at the university. George planned to join the Air Force after college but got a message from one of the track coaches at Northsun University asking if he

would like to attend the university. The financial aid the university offered fit his needs and he decided to attend. He participates in the Rising Scholars and Black Student Union (BSU) student organizations at Northsun University. His primary motivation for attending college is because he wants to live a better life than the one, he lives now. He plans to work as a traveling physical therapist after college.

Samuel

Samuel is a 20-year-old junior in college and the youngest of four children. He is a communications major. Samuel participates in campus ministry, the Rising Scholars program, and hosted the Black American Achievement Awards at the university. He also serves as a resident assistant. He chose the university due to the amount of financial aid offered. Samuel would not attend the university again if he had to make a college choice due to the escalating expenses of the university and the campus culture. His primary motivation for continuing in college is to "break curses" for his kids and his future grandchildren. He wants to eventually work as a journalist after graduation.

Tariq

Tariq is a 19-year-old sophomore in college and the oldest of three children. He majors in nursing and participates in the Rising Scholars program. He works at the information desk which was a job he was able to obtain through the recommendation of another older Black male at the university. He chose the university due to the amount of money offered and to avoid living in a dorm and paying out of state tuition. He would attend the university again if he had to make a college choice because it allows him to be close to his family. Tariq has a deep sense of responsibility to his family. His primary reasons for continuing in college are because he does not want to let his parents down and he does not want to waste their money. His thoughts about

what his parents sacrificed for him to attend college is another motivation for him to succeed in college. He plans to pursue a career in nursing after graduation.

Amante

Amante is a 20-year-old junior in college and was raised in a single parent household where he was the only child. He majors in computer science and participates in Lion club, which is a club for computer science majors at Northsun University. Amante also participates in the American Red Cross and the Rising Scholars program at the university. He attended the university because he received a scholarship that covered most of his tuition and the university was very close to his home. He would attend the university again if he had to make a college choice due to the amount of financial aid offered, the ability to not take out student loans, and his appreciation for the diversity of the university. His primary reasons for continuing in college is that he wants to be “somebody different,” “stand out,” and “set an example “for other Black males” in his community. Amante wants to pursue a career in software technology after graduation.

Staff Research Participants

The staff participants in this study were from different offices at Northsun University but were all involved in Black male retention initiatives at the University. Many of the staff participants were involved in either developing or executing supports for Black male students at Northsun University. Each staff participant was aware of the challenges that students faced at the university but lamented their lack of ability to implement significant changes in retention efforts at the University, due to the limitations of their staff position. Staff participants participated in the study in the hopes of possibly improving existing retention initiatives and supports as well as thinking of ways new supports could be developed.

Laura

Laura is the Executive Director of Academic Student Support at Northsun University. Laura has been at the university for almost 20 years in various roles. Many of the tutorial programs offered at Northsun University run through her office. Laura is also responsible for the university's early alert academic system and was trying to create a centralized, cohesive model of academic support for students that involves input from all staff. Laura was worried that many faculty, staff, and coaches do not attempt to engage her office until it is too late. Laura was aware of retention issues with Black male students, specifically Black male student athletes, and did her best to build relationships with Black male students that come to her office. She was often mentioned as a person that Black male students could "go to" for support. Many of the Black male students interviewed mentioned her name as one of the people at the university who was a strong source of support.

Amy

Amy is the Assistant Vice President of the Office Diversity Equity and Inclusion at Northsun University. Amy worked at Northsun University for the past 10 years, starting as a Director of Graduate Admission before moving to her current role within the last 2 years. Amy has personal experience with the importance of retention issues as a woman of color. Amy's office supports Black student organizations at Northsun University including the Rising Scholars program and the BSU. Many initiatives regarding Black students at the university have been a result of the way her office advocated for additional staff and funding to improve outreach and retention at Northsun University. Amy's office tried to counter microaggressions and other racial incidents at Northsun University through developing an anonymous reporting system. Eventually, Amy wants to hire staff solely dedicated to retention of students of color.

Leslie

Leslie is the Director of TRIO at Northsun University. Leslie helps support first generation students of color who enroll at Northsun University. Leslie's office focuses directly on the retention of first-generation students at Northsun University, as many of the over 200 students in the TRIO program are Hispanic and Black low-income students. Leslie's office is often in constant contact with the advising office, student support offices, and Office of Inclusive Excellence Office at Northsun University. Leslie engages with many of the students at the TRIO program by talking with them, eating lunch with them, and following-up on their academic and social concerns. Leslie's office has been nicknamed "the porch" by many Black male students at Northsun University including the students interviewed in this research study due its popularity among Black students. Many students viewed Leslie's office as a "safe space." Students felt they could "connect" with other Black male students at Northsun University by going to the TRIO office. The TRIO office itself is an inviting space with tables, chairs, and couches designed to encourage collaboration and warm inviting colors. Leslie wanted to do more to target Black male students in the program but lacked the funding necessary to achieve these goals.

Solange

Solange is the Assistant Vice President of Student Success and has worked in higher education for over 20 years but has been at Northsun University for over four years. Solange has experience in academic advising, strategic enrollment management, and student success. Solange developed extensive relationships with the Black male student population at Northsun University through her work with the Rising Scholars and BSU. She is focused on transitioning the university's faculty-based academic advising model to a traditional professional advising model. Solange noted that many Black male students felt that their concerns were not being heard by

those at the university. Solange also noted that many Black male students developed extensive relationships with the Executive Director of Academic Student Support at Northsun University as well as the Director of TRIO and these two staff members are seen as “trusted, caring” professionals among Black male students. According to Solange, in some instances, Black male students did not know about certain supports offer by the University until they heard about the Academic and Learner Support Center from other Black male students.

Katy

Katy is the Department Chair for Communications at Northsun University. Katy attended Northsun University as a student and has been at Northsun University as a faculty and department chair for over 20 years. Katy taught a communications course that must be taken by all freshmen students. Katy regularly performs equity audits for her department courses to ensure that the department is reaching all at risk students. During one of her equity audits, Katy noticed that her students of color, specifically Black male and Latino students, had the highest percentages of failing grades in her class. Katy did a research study that focused on an academic intervention, where she distributed “touch base” surveys online through the LMS with students every week. Katy administered these “touch base” surveys before academic advisors had reached out to the students. Katy noticed that often these students were too ashamed to admit the course was moving too fast or that they needed assistance. After they indicated they were struggling on the survey, Katy approached these students and offered additional academic support. She found that their grades improved after her intervention. Katy reported and presented the results of her research study to higher levels of administration but there was no follow through on applying it to other departments in the university.

Kevin

Kevin is the Director of Institutional Effectiveness at Northsun University. He has been employed at Northsun University for 17 years and is the Co-Chair of the University Institutional Effectiveness Committee. Kevin has worked in various roles at Northsun University including work as student support specialist as well as the head of an affinity group for Hispanic students at Northsun University. Kevin has an extensive institutional knowledge of the initiatives that Northsun University has used to improve retention of students of color at Northsun University and had a variety of ideas on the ways that retention initiatives at Northsun University could be improved. Kevin works closely with the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and considers himself a strong supporter of initiatives for first generation minority students.

Presentation of Findings

This phenomenological study focused on understanding and analyzing the lived experiences of Black male students and administrators regarding the coping strategies and support systems that aid persistence of Black male students in college and the effectiveness of Black male retention initiatives at Northsun University. The research study began with the collection of data via a Google form survey that served as a screener to ensure all research participants met the criterion to participate in the survey. Semi-structured interviews with the 12 participants were conducted using zoom. The semi-structured interviews consisted of 13 open-ended questions. Each research study participant discussed their experiences with Black male retention and persistence, things that they thought Northsun University could improve upon, and the alignment of Black male retention strategies at Northsun University with Black male persistence strategies. Five main themes and a variety of subthemes emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interview data. The themes are listed in Table 3:

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Fragmented Black Male Retention Strategies	Limited Support
Constellation of Support Systems	Reliance on Student Organization Family Support, Caring Faculty Member, Mentorship, Intrinsic Motivation, Coaches, Community Support, Friends, Informal Affinity Groups, Student Organization
Awareness of and Responses to Barriers to Persistence	Hopelessness, Determination, Disengagement, Dejection, Despondence, Racial Battle Fatigue, Cynicism
Inconsistent Implementation of Institutional Support	Staff Member Agency, Disconnected Institutional Support, Staff Turnover
Lack of Consistent Support from University Administration	Lack of Funding, Box-Ticking, Performative Support

Theme 1: Generalized, Fragmented Black Male Retention Strategy

Tinto (2009) discussed the importance of colleges taking student retention seriously and stated that because of colleges' approaches to student retention, "student experiences are increasingly segmented into smaller and smaller pieces; their relationships becoming more narrow and more specialized" (p5). Hilton et al. (2012) stated that Black male retention recommendations for practice are often linked to campus climate, academic support, co-curricular opportunities, and cultural sensitivity for staff. Johnson (2014) focused on the vital role that a combination of "institutional intentionality and social support play in student achievement" (p44). Intentionality in higher education, as defined by Harper (2011), refers to reflectively and deliberately employing a set of strategies to produce a desired educational outcome is at the heart of most retention strategies.

In this dissertation, intentionality in Black male retention strategies can be thought of as the entire university community from Board members to staff and students being involved in the design and implementation of Black male retention initiatives. The semi-structured interviews in

this research study helped to illustrate that Black male retention strategy at Northsun University was very general and fragmented. Both students and staff in this research study were aware that Northsun University's retention strategy for Black males was not connected in a meaningful way. Black male students who realized the inconsistent nature of the Black male retention strategy at Northsun University were often disappointed and determined to simply "get through" or "cope" with challenges on their own. This theme aligns with and answers Research Question 1 (What are some of the coping strategies and support systems used by current Black male students who have persisted at this HSI?) and Research Question 2 (To what degree do current retention strategies used by this HSI reflect, align, and interconnect with the persistence strategies, lived experiences and historical institutionalized barriers to persistence experienced by Black male students?).

The semi structured interview responses from both Black male students and staff at the Northsun University illustrate the generalized, fragmented nature of Black male retention strategies at the Northsun University. For example, Leslie, the Director of TRIO at Northsun University stated:

I think strategy, so like, strategic, strategic initiatives, not just initiative, just to say, we did it to check it off. So, partnering with the athletic partners, with other different, um more Black leaders, inviting special speakers who are of color to come speak. The university is not doing anything, um to provide for African American male students to keep them persistent and in good standing in college.

Solange, the Assistant Vice President of Student Success at Northsun University echoed a similar sentiment when discussion Black male retention initiatives. She stated:

We don't have anything specific for Black male students, when it comes to things like you know mental health support. We don't have anything specific, the only thing we have is the Rising scholar's program, but that's for all Black students.

Amy, the Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Northsun University again mirrored previous staff responses when discussing the intentionality of Northsun University regarding Black male retention initiatives. She said, "and the reason that they hired a Chief Diversity Officer was because the students demanded it, they demanded a CDO." Amy also explained, "And the general supports that they offer everybody, I honestly don't think there is anything dedicated to Black male students."

When asked about challenges at the Northsun University and how he responded to those challenges, Amante, a 20-year-old junior at the Northsun University stated:

Well in my case, uh, I had some problems with this university, believe it or not, it wasn't like problems, like big problems. There are some rumors in there with stuff from, not necessarily Black people, but from other like other people, like racists and stuff. I learned to you know, like shut that off, like, don't let it impact you because, you know, some people just want to bring you down regardless, or, like, wherever you at.

When asked about the challenges Northsun University had as far as Black male retention initiatives, Laura, the Executive Director of Academic and Learning Support at Northsun University indicated:

Administration, Administration, Administration, People talk about being inclusive, but often from my perspective, the version of inclusivity that gets, um, uh, I'm going to say this in the most judicious way I can, that gets used or applied to me often has, um, negative racial effects. Um, I think people know, know yet what inclusivity means

because they think inclusivity is somehow this, uh, get give them their sheet of paper. At the end, you know, when we wouldn't do that with every group of students, we would be more of like, what will help them succeed in X, Y, Z.

When asked about the Northsun University's role in promoting Black male retention initiatives, Samuel, a 20-year-old junior, used the example of Valentines Day and Black History month to illustrate the University's commitment to Black male initiatives. He said:

Valentine's Day is great, but it took like two weeks to get the one banner hanging up when you walk into the diner that says Black History Month, two weeks. Then the day after Valetine's Day, basically, then shamrocks got put up. So, it's like, what is the intention, what is the real importance that we have, like, are we valued?

Samuel also stated:

Because it's not like, it's not like we don't do stuff around this campus, it's not like we're some of the most known people around this campus. Like, just anywhere you go, like, the exact demographic for your study is for like, we're around. So it's like, I don't know if I hate it or like, but it's like, not even just that, but it's like our BSU organization, for instance, it really isn't, it's a thing, but it's not really a thing. Like, it's kind of, a lot of times it feels like it is much more tolerated than celebrated.

It is clear from the comments of the staff and student comments above that Northsun University does not have a coherent Black male retention strategy that aligns with the ways in which Black male students persist. Black male students and staff want more targeted Black male retention initiatives from Northsun University that have a better chance of being effective.

Theme 2: Constellation of Support Systems

Multiple researchers investigating Black male retention at colleges and universities supported the notion that Black male students use multiple systems of social and institutional supports to persist in college. For example, Ricard and Pelletier (2016) discussed how parental support and involvement can increase the morale and persistence of students in college. Dancy (2010) discussed the role that the spirituality of Black men can play in assisting Black male students to combat a variety of social and academic challenges in college. Harper (2007) found that peer support could increase Black male retention at colleges and universities by increasing their sense of belonging through identifying with other Black male students with similar backgrounds and experiences who could serve as a guide in navigating personal and academic challenges. Brooms (2017) also found that faculty mentors helped to increase Black male students' sense of belonging on campus and aided in their identity development. Asgari and Carter (2016) noted that peer mentoring can be an effective retention tool for Black males in higher education. Morales et al. (2016) found that mentors with backgrounds, experiences, and cultural values like their proteges are often in a better position to translate and transmit valuable information or behaviors effectively. Harper and Quale (2007) indicated that student organizations served as a form of racial uplift, identity development and "safe spaces" for Black males to engage with the university community outside of class.

In this research study, it was clear that some students placed more emphasis on one form of social support compared to other students. It was also clear that many of the Black male student participants in the research study used a variety of support systems to persist in college and that each support system was connected in different ways for each Black male student participant. The constellation of supports theme that emerged in this research study answered Research Question 1: What were some of the coping strategies and support systems used by

current Black male students who have persisted at this HSI? The semi-structured interviews responses below illustrate the variety of coping strategies and support systems that Black male students at Northsun University used to persist in college when confronted with personal and academic challenges. For example, Samuel, a 20-year-old sophomore at Northsun University, discussed his support system for persistence in college and stated:

Okay, I'm truly, and I was just writing a paper about it, like the idea, it takes a village. Like, it really needs a whole ecosystem. Like I would love to say it would be just my sister for one, or my mother, mother figures. I have, or like, my older brother figures, like I feel the beauty and the need of like a community, that what we need, like reason, like you need multiple people for this study, like it so many different perspectives to build a well-rounded individual.

Kasion, a 23-year-old senior at Northsun University, discussed his support system for persistence in college and stated:

Nobody could make me, I'm a real big fan of saying nobody can make you do anything. Like they say, you know, you can lead a camel to water, but you can't make it drink pretty much. And that was me, Like I had the materials, I had the right tools right in front of me. But I didn't feel like it. You know, I was lazy, I'm still lazy, I don't want to do work right now. I'm tired and that caught up with me pretty much. And it was just me saying, you know what? I don't want to hear my mom's mouth. I don't want to hear my pastor's mouth. So, I might as well go ahead and do what I need to do, so I can get out of here. My pastor is just another father figure for me, and you know, dads won't let nothing go if you do something wrong, pretty much, so it was either hear that for the next 10

years, just get it together there/You know, my pastor, my co-pastor, my mom, like I had the support system. Like there was nothing holding me back.

Kasion continued:

Stigmatism in society about how men are supposed to be, this and men are supposed to be that. And most of this isn't coming from men themselves but were going to get into that topic. Um, so me and him started like an unofficial, just men's group to where we would meet every Friday. We haven't done it in a while because we've been busy, but we will meet every Friday and just check in, whatever you need to talk about, whatever you need, if you felt some type of way about something, we would just talk to each other and we would give advice from there. So, it's on a student level. That was my group.

When discussing his support system for persistence in college, George, a 20-year-old sophomore at Northsun University, explained:

Um, my family and friends have helped me, uh, my family especially has supported me in anything I want to do in terms of uh, you know pursuing college and um, putting their faith in me and trust, to um, get, do what needs to be done. Um, checking up on me, understanding you know, financially, of course, um, understanding and being open to receiving whatever I say and like not going to the left with it and just take a minute to see my perspectives on things. I can have an open-ended and always calling me even when I'm too busy. You know, um, yeah, I would say it's a very emotional thing that the family could bring, you grow to appreciate them while you're away from them.

Amante, a 19-year-old sophomore at Northsun University, indicated:

I usually try to do it alone, but I do have support systems. Like I have friends outside the university that I can talk to, and I have people at the university that I can talk to, whether

it is some of my friends or like the family members who are just willing to sit down and listen to me. I have people to talk to or turn to in times of need. I'm just stubborn. I feel like I should be able to do it alone.

Amante also stated:

Cause some of the people, I mostly hanging around are Black men that are older than me. And it helps that they have been going to school for so long. So whatever information that they have, they'll put me on. Like my friend, George, he's a year older than me and he got me the information desk job that I do now at the school. He helped me with that and also kind of directed me toward Miss Johnson. When it feels like just still struggles and not wanting to reach out, I think, I can really talk to him about it as well, because he gets it.

Amante also shared:

The thing is my mother is very supportive of me. So, she persuaded me to go to college. But my family is kind of different. So, like my family don't really support me as much as I want to, but its fine, my mom took care of me the majority of my life, and like she made sure the bills were paid, and she had decent jobs, I traded school and stuff, so my main motivation factor is her.

Theme 3: Awareness of and Responses to Barriers to Persistence

There are a multitude of barriers that influence Black male retention in college and each student has different levels of awareness of these barriers to persistence and each student will respond to the presence of these barriers in different ways. For example, according to Nelson et al. (2020), Black males may enter college with “lots of baggage to unpack, in the form of psychological stress, racism, stereotypes, bigotry, xenophobia and lack of diversity, and

inclusion on campuses where they are conspicuous as the minority” (p.3). Nelson et al. also found that lack of financial support from their families due to low-income backgrounds may be present, which results in Black male students being forced to be self-sufficient. It is important for colleges and universities to devise Black male retention strategies that account for the variety of barriers to persistence that Black males face. One of the most common barriers to persistence that Black males face is discrimination and stereotypes. Steele (2010) found that Black males often battle internal and external pressures related to their academic ability and performance in college because of racialized stereotypes. Mcgee and Martin (2011) discussed the internalization of racism and racial battle fatigue, or instances where racism started to affect a person mentally and physically because of dealing with racialized incidents on a daily basis. According to Smith et al. (2007), this internalization of racism can lead to shock, confusion, anxiousness, anger, vulnerability, fear, and loneliness. Smith et al. found that Black men responded in different ways when faced with racial discrimination and that some Black men who experienced racial discrimination were even more determined to persist in college while others were affected in a negative way.

An awareness and understanding of how Black men respond to barriers to persistence in college can help colleges and universities tailor institutional resources to align with Black male responses to barriers to persistence. The theme of awareness of and responses to barriers to persistence that emerged from the semi-structured interviews in this research question helped to answer Research Question 2: To what degree do current retention strategies used by the HSI reflect, align, and interconnect with the persistence strategies, lived experiences and historical institutionalized barriers to persistence experienced by Black male students?

It is clear from this research study, that Black male students and staff are aware of barriers to persistence for Black males but have a variety of suggestions for how to overcome these barriers to persistence. For example, Kasion, a 23-year-old senior student at Northsun University, explained:

So, um, from a student perspective, yes, from staff, faculty, or admin, there are only a certain select few that I feel as true. I am looked at or I am seen pretty much, like, I my definition of being valued, respected and stuff like that. Like you see me, you see the work ethic, that I'm putting forth. You see that I am trying my best no matter what, what situation, I'm in and you respect that pretty much. And so, um there are only a select few people here.

Kasion continued:

You can just tell that Black male, it just a rocky state pretty much, they do little meticulous things that show like, oh, they really don't care pretty much. So, I mean, I don't, I wouldn't say that I fully feel that way, but it just, you know, it happens in the world all the time to where they're not directly talking to you, but they indirectly do stuff.

Amy, the Assistant Vice President of the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Northsun University, discussed racial discrimination at the institution and shared:

Um, in conversations we've had with them, um, you know, students will come to our office and talk to us about, you know, what's going on. We were trying to educate everybody and sensitize everybody to like the experiences of Black and Brown people. For example, we created an incident bias report. That was the first time we did because we were hearing that, you know, there, there's a lot of racism. There's a lot of microaggressions going on.

Laura, the Executive Director of Academic and Learner Supports, discussed Northsun University's responses to the barriers Black male students faced when persisting in college and stated:

We do have the DEI, the Office of DEI, which we did not have functional before. That really did kind of push towards creating think tanks and getting students to talk about their experiences. I don't know what happened beyond them coming to talk about it. Like, I don't know if they used any of the information to then implement any changes. We're not doing this the best way we can.

Laura also stated:

So you are catching me on a down period, because I just had three Black men in my office, feeling despondent and dejected telling me how disengaged they are and how they feel angry about it, but can't express it because they don't want to be stereotypical.

When asked about resources Northsun University provided for Black male students, Samuel, a 20-year-old junior, indicated:

A lot of demographics we come from, like, we're not just making money like that. So, we're like, we go to school in Oaklawn, but a whole lot of us aren't from Oaklawn. So, it really starts at that. Then it's also like, even just feeling like your voice isn't heard or like really being able to like, I'm trying to think of the word, like really resonate or relate with everybody around, like there's definitely good staff here like, Laura, or course, when you talk to Miss Johnson, to all the people in TRIO, like I really like them a whole lot.

Samuel continued:

But a lot of like, a lot of the resources, it just seems like they get taken away or like, they're like taken down to an extent. Okay, like I talked about the campus ministry before, and I wasn't even like any necessarily religious wise but it's like there were retreats that people could go on and it was like a break. It was like something that was really necessary but it's like right now, it might be the end of those, so this might be the last year they even do it. Which is a vital thing that could help a lot of students.

Dante, a 21-year-old junior, discussed feeling valued and respected at the university and stated, "It's like, it doesn't matter to me, like who values and who respects me, Like I'm just here to like, to go to school, like do my job." Leslie, the Director of TRIO at Northsun University, discussed barriers for Black male students and shared:

You say, I'm having financial challenges, help me, help me, and sadly enough, it's like we don't have a lot of scholarship opportunities for African American students. Um so like, that is a big barrier, I think to keep him like, even as far as like book and textbook assistance, like we don't have many resources, and things available for resources like that. Another challenge is representation, we don't have a lot of faculty, we have a lot of White faculty members rather than people of color.

Katy, Communications Department Chair at Northsun University, noted the barriers that Black male students may face when receiving on time academic assistance. She stated:

Okay, definitely not collab, It's definitely not collaborative. One of these, where you wonder, you put your alert into the system and pray, and then wonder, yeah and then sometimes you won't get an email back until almost the end of the semester saying, okay we followed up.

Theme 4: Inconsistent Implementation of Institutional Support

In *Management Fads in Higher Education*, Birnbaum (2000) discussed the importance of strategic planning in higher education. He stated:

The problem with formal planning did not seem to do what management said it would, campuses first tried one approach and then failed another. The fundamental failure of strategic planning, in business or education, was the implicit assumption that the analytic process of planning can lead to a synthesizing process of strategy (p.21).

It can be inferred from this quote that, for a strategic plan to work the way it is intended, HEIs must have a synthesized, aligned, or collaborative strategy. If one applies the concept of a collaborative, strategic planning strategy to Black male retention at Northsun University, it is necessary to realize that executing a Black male retention plan requires a consistent approach that allows all members of the Northsun University community to “participate” in its execution. After the analysis of the semi-structured interview data, the theme of inconsistent implementation of institutional support emerged. Specifically, most of Northsun University’s supports related to Black male retention or creating a sense of belonging for Black male students were the result of the efforts of a few “caring staff members” who worked on the retention of Black male students “out of the goodness of their heart “or through volunteering. Similarly, some staff concerned with Black male retention started retention initiatives without support coming from upper administration. Black male students were very aware that only a few staff members at the Northsun University would be “consistent” in providing support to them. The theme of inconsistent institutional support for Black male students answers Research Question 2: To what degree do current retention strategies used by the HSI reflect, align, and interconnect with the persistence strategies, lived experiences, and historical institutionalized barriers to persistence experienced by Black male students?

Kasion, a 20-year-old Black male student at Northsun University, was asked about who at the university they go to for assistance and support and stated:

Laura is basically my school mother personally, like, I go to her about everything. Like she knows pretty much a lot of stuff about me and what goes on at my school. And it's not the fact that, like you know, she has to do it. Like, Laura is one of those people that it doesn't matter if you're Black, White, Blue, White, Grey, Green. If you are a student, she's gonna fight for you regardless. If she sees that something's not fair, like she's gonna fight for you. And like, she goes out of her way. I've even brought people to her that didn't know her from a can of paint, I'd be like go talk to Laura. She would know more than I do. And Laura would help them immediately and give them advice or send them to the people that need to be directed to.

Kasion also mentioned:

It feels good to know, these are the people that I can go to when I need just to feel comfortable, and so like Rising Scholars was just, there's a lady named Ms. Johnson. Yeah, I personally, I started calling her the Moses of the university because she just decides to find money anywhere for anybody, and she's another reason why I'm still in school because I couldn't pay for none of this. She was just like, okay. I'm gonna increase this, you should get some money back, pay this off. Then you should be good. I love Ms. Johnson; she is somebody's grandma and she gonna be mine soon.

Amy, the Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion explained how she planned to address Black male retention stated:

I'm hiring a person dedicated to these groups, because we have, we had volunteers, they were staff volunteers that were helping these like, student organizations, you know, get

organized, and things like that but they weren't even getting paid. So, they were doing it out of you know, the kindness of their heart, but they were you know, it was a lot and we felt that these groups were very, very important.

When asked if the idea to hire a person dedicated to the student organizations that support retention was mandated by upper administration or if it was solely the idea of her office, Amy said, "these ideas were mine and Dr. Larson's."

Similarly, Leslie discussed being an advisor for the Black student union and being the Director of TRIO. She stated, "They keep saying things like, Leslie, when is your last day, you're not leaving us are you? So, we do have that barrier, they are used to staff members coming and going." When discussing the work involved in helping run student organizations like Rising Scholars and BSU, Leslie indicated:

Someone needs to be in charge of that, it needs to be full time, and it's like we all, like each staff member tries to help out, but again, we like TRIO's, I always say my time and effort has to go to TRIO, and that takes, that's a lot.

Samuel, a 20-year-old junior at Northsun University, was asked if there were multiple staff members at Northsun University who he could go to for support and he stated:

You know, it's really like each other (other Black males), like there's people who empathize and will listen and be helpful and really care but is really like just each other (other Black males) and like the head of Athletics. His name is John, that definitely a guy, I know a lot of people like really rock with and really appreciate, but I mean he's really the only real like staff member, I can even think of and I mean he's in Athletic.

Theme 5: Lack of Support from University Administration

In the book, *Student Retention and Success in Higher Education* (Thomas et al., 2021), the researchers emphasized the importance of collaborative responsibility for student success, partnerships with students, and the use of data along with the incorporation of student voice as prerequisites for a successful retention plan. Collaborative responsibility for student success allows a wide variety of expertise and viewpoints on student retention to be considered when reflecting, implementing, and assessing a student retention plan. After an analysis of the semi-structured interview response, the theme of a lack of support from university administration at Northsun University emerged. The responses of Black male students at Northsun University and staff indicated the Black male retention plan was not aligned with Black male persistence strategies in a holistic, collaborative way. The theme of a lack of support from university administration at Northsun University helped to answer Research Question 2: To what degree do current retention strategies used by the HSI reflect, align, and interconnect with the persistence strategies, lived experiences, and historical institutionalized barriers to persistence experienced by Black male students? It was clear from the semi-structured interviews that staff wanted to do more for Black male students and Black male students wanted more to be done. The lack of consistent support from university administration seemed to affect students and staff in a negative way. For example, when Laura, the Executive Director of Academic and Learner Support, discussed university support for an initiative to help Black male students that she wanted to implement she stated:

There is no funding to back up an initiative. I mean, I feel like it has to start up like it's got to start from the top to come down, I think having more student representatives in senior leadership meetings, or not being coerced into saying anything or be you know chosen intentionally, for one reason or another, but just allowing student voices to be

heard without fear in higher positions like the board, you know, senior leadership, like extended leadership.

Laura discussed how Black male students feel about the university's support for initiatives like Black History Month. She mentioned:

Um, we already have shamrocks up in parts of the school. Um and so many of my Black students who are close to me who visit me often, they're upset, upset by that because then they see anything else that comes out of the university this month, it just feels like a box tick.

Kasion, a 23-year-old Black male student at Northsun University, was asked about university support for Black male students and stated, "But as far as connecting with like people, admin and higher powers don't really, I can say that they don't, as much as they need to get the opinions of students, whether its black or not, they just don't." Kasion also shared his view of administration at the college:

Everything clicked for me at that point. Okay, so they are going to do things that's best for the business. Basically, they're going to do things as best for the school and not what's best for the students, pretty much.

Samuel, a 23-year-old Black male student at Northsun University mentioned how the university approached him and other Black men to talk about their experiences at the university, he indicated:

And so, it's kind of similar to your study, which, I almost wish it was just with you, Because, like, we were able to ban like eight guys together, basically. And we all went to an office, and they were asking us. Not exactly, the questions that you were asking but similar questions and we were probably for an hour just discussing and having a

legitimate conversation, like legitimate opinions that like things need to change but it's like this is two semesters later and nothing came out of it. It's like, even if you ask the staff, it's like, yeah, we haven't heard anything about that.

Dante, a 20-year-old Black male student at Northsun University, discussed the consistency of university supports for Black male students and stated, "it's kind of on and off, but a lot of things they can improve on, like having more scholarship opportunities for Black male students." Amy, the Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Northsun University, discussed the goals of the Rising Scholars Program and the BSU before she joined her current office. She explained:

And Rising Scholars seldom met, So, before, these two groups were just like, kind of like student groups that were out there, and they were just floating out there. They didn't really have any, you know structure, but we, we took on as part of our strategic plan, our diversity strategic plan. It was important that we take these two groups and empower them and have money behind them.

Amy, also referenced how Black male students could partner with administration on Black male retention initiatives:

I think, um, it's important to give them a space at the table. Let them go to a board meeting. Have our students go to the board meeting, you know. Have them be represented and represent themselves there. Um, you know when it comes to, I mean, we do have student government, a student government, and they meet with the higher ups and stuff like that, but there not we're talking about Black males in there. So, we have to do something to engage them, to be to want to be part of it, to want to be. Sometimes, I

feel like some students, you know, on both ends again, you know, will feel like defeated and they'll be like, you know, what the purpose and nothing is going to change anyway.

Solange, the Assistant Vice President of Student Success at Northsun University, discussed how the university could partners with Black male students in constructing Black male retention plans and stated:

I think, first and foremost, they need to um, have conversations with Black male students. Um, I'm sure those students are feeling like, you know, nobody, leadership doesn't come talk to us. They made decisions based on what they think we need. Um, so, I think the first step is to talk to these students and listen to them. Um, get their feedback, see what it is they need. Um and go from there. I think, um having Black male students, um you know, if say there's a committee, um that is designated or designed to, um create initiatives for Black males, in addition you know, faculty and staff, have some Black male students participate on that committee. I think attending events where there's Black male students so that, um you know these students see you as being more present, more approachable.

Katy, the Communication Department Chair at Northsun University, discussed the coordination of the Black male retention programs at Northsun University. She stated:

And, I think we have a lot of great resources. I am always amazed that it doesn't get communicated enough. I think we expect to tell them once and they are going to get it. And we have the vast majority of our students, who have never had anyone in their life, go to college. They don't have that, don't have that, I hate the phrase, social capital. They don't have an older brother and older sister, a parent who has been through this before.

Summary

The main purpose of this chapter was to provide a sense of the 12 research study participants thoughts, opinions, and lived experiences concerning Black male retention and persistence at Northsun University, an HSI in the Midwest. Participants answered 12 semi-structured interview questions. The five themes that emerged from this research study were: (a) fragmented black male retention strategies, (b) constellation of support systems, (c) awareness and responses to barriers to persistence, (d) inconsistent implementation of institutional supports, and (e) lack of support from university administration. The next chapter includes the implications of the study for Black male retention and persistence in HEIs, recommendations for future research theoretical implications of the study, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and the conclusion.

The themes that emerged in this study helped to answer the research questions that focused on the coping strategies and support systems of Black male students and their alignment with Black male retention strategies and plans at Northsun University. The results of the semi-structured interviews showed that Black male students use a variety of support systems and coping strategies that include both familial, spiritual, and institutional support. The results indicated that many staff at Northsun University tried to create a welcoming environment at the institution for Black male students on their own but were not supported by upper levels of administration in their efforts. The efforts of Northsun University regarding Black male retention were considered “performative” and created cynicism and distrust among Black male students. Black male students and staff were aware of the lack of alignment and intersection of Northsun University’s Black male retention strategies and the coping strategies and support systems that Black male students used to persist in college. Black male students and staff were eager to

suggest reforms that could improve the retention strategies of Northsun University while integrating Black male voices in the preparation, implementation, and execution of new Black male retention initiatives. Black male students and staff seemed focused on actionable, measurable changes in Northsun University's Black male retention strategies. The results of the semi-structured interview also indicate how important peer mentoring and affinity groups were for increasing Black male persistence and making students aware of resources that Northsun University offered to aid in Black male persistence.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to investigate the alignment between Black male persistence and coping strategies when faced with historical institutionalized barriers to persistence and the Black male retention strategies and efforts of Northsun University, an HSI in the Midwest. Specifically, there was an investigation of the degree to which the Black male retention efforts of Northsun University included and reflected Black male students lived experiences as well as an awareness of the barriers to persistence that Black male students faced. To accomplish these research study goals, the researcher interviewed six Black male students and six staff at Northsun University using semi-structured interview questions. Using the Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory (BMALST) as a theoretical framework, the collaboration between Black male students and Northsun University in Black male student persistence and retention was examined holistically in a way that emphasized various social, institutional, and personal factors that could influence Black male persistence and retention at Northsun University. Many Black male students and staff realized the variety of ways that Black male students persisted, but their responses varied in their perceptions of the degree of effectiveness of Northsun University's Black male retention strategies and what could be done to improve Black male retention at Northsun University.

This chapter includes a summary of the research and a discussion and interpretation of the research study findings that were introduced in Chapter 4 with further elaboration of the themes and subthemes. The chapter also includes an application of the BMALST (Goings, 2021) to Northsun University's Black male retention strategies to determine if there was alignment between the ways in which Black male students persist as demonstrated in this research study and the Black male retention strategies Northsun University used to aid Black male students in

persisting. There is a discussion of the importance of the study in understanding Black male persistence and retention in higher education as well as a discussion of the implications of the study regarding HEIs implementing holistic, strategic Black male retention strategies. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for additional research on Black male persistence and retention.

Summary of Research

This phenomenological research included semi-structured interviews with six Black male undergraduate students enrolled full time at Northsun University, an HSI in the Midwest, between the ages of 18-30 and six Northsun University staff members who worked for Northsun University for more than six months and had a role in Black male retention at Northsun University. After the semi-structured interviews and multiple rounds of coding, the following five themes emerged: (a) fragmented Black male retention strategies, (b) constellation of support systems, (c) awareness and responses to barriers to persistence, (d) inconsistent implementation of institutional support, and (e) lack of consistent support from university administration. The themes that emerged in this research study were similar to themes that emerged after an analysis of Black male retention literature. The researcher used the themes that emerged in this research study to answer the following research questions:

1. What are some of the coping strategies and support systems used by current Black male students who have persisted at this HSI?
2. To what degree do current retention strategies used by the HSI, reflect, align, and interconnect with the persistence strategies, lived experiences and historical institutionalized barrier to persistence experienced by Black male students?

A summary of the research study findings indicated that Black male students had multiple methods of coping with barriers to persistence encountered at Northsun University. Black male students coped with barriers to persistence by “getting through it” through intrinsic motivation without using a large percentage of available institutional support systems or using a constellation of support systems comprised of familial support, peer support, peer mentoring, community support, and institutional support through a few “trusted” staff members and bonds formed in two specific student organizations at the Northsun University. Five of the six Black male students in the research study cited peer support and peer mentoring as important to their persistence at the Northsun University because older Black male students who served as informal mentors could “pass on” information to younger Black male students. Black male students in this research study had lived experiences that provided them with “motivation” to be “different” than the common stereotyped images of Black males in society as unmotivated and lazy.

Many Black male students in this research study were aware of the barriers to persistence at Northsun University but were cynical about the chances that supports for Black male students would be increased in the future because previous outreach to Black male students at Northsun University did not yield actionable retention strategies that affected Black male students in a meaningful way. The findings of this study were aligned with other research studies of Black male experiences at HSIs (Brooms, 2021; Hargrove, 2014; Redding, 2012). Specifically, the perception of microaggressions experienced by Black male student at Northsun University as well as the use of familial support, peer groups, and institutional support provided by some staff at Northsun University aligned with the experiences of Black male students in previous research on HSIs.

Many of the Black male research study participants perceived the university as only engaging in activities to support Black males in a way that did not illustrate a sense of urgency about addressing Black male student concerns. Many of the staff research study participants at Northsun University were aware of the barriers to persistence that male students encountered and generally thought that more could be done to improve the Northsun University's Black male retention plan but lamented the lack of wider university administrative support. It is important to reiterate that although the staff participants at Northsun University were involved in Black male retention initiatives, many of the staff participants did not have the power to make immediate changes to the retention strategies of the University. The staff cited the fact that many of Northsun University's initiatives that would target Black male students were discontinued after the person who led the initiative left the university. As a result of many Black male retention initiatives not being sustained, the staff in this research study often engaged in assisting Black male student on their own and were seen as trusted staff who many Black male students at the university considered to be "family." Many staff who assisted Black male students were not compensated for their efforts and assisted Black male students out of the "kindness" of their heart. Some staff shared similar personal and economic backgrounds with Black male students and saw working with these students a "labor of love."

Northsun University staff who assisted Black male students without compensation thought this method of assistance for Black male was inadequate and unsustainable, given that these staff were assisting Black male students in addition to their daily roles at the university. Both Black male students and Northsun University staff thought that the Northsun University's Black male retention initiatives were not effective and could be better with the integration of Black male voices. There was a divergence between Black male students and Northsun

University staff regarding the most important factors affecting Black male retention with students focusing on campus culture and climate and staff focusing on the amount of funding for initiatives that could target Black males. The divergence between the views of Black male students and staff at Northsun University offer an opportunity for Northsun University to partner with Black male students to design and implement Black male retention initiatives. Through leveraging the experiences of Black male students at Northsun University, university staff can design a Black male retention plan that will align with the ways in which Black male students at Northsun University persist in college.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

To begin the discussion of the findings of this research study, it is important to first consider the importance of reflection on the current Black male retention initiatives of a HEI before the implementation of improved Black male retention initiatives, due to the possibility that implementing a Black male retention plan without an overarching strategic synergy could be ineffective. Tinto (2012) referenced the importance of an aligned, coherent strategy. Although Tinto discussed overall retention strategies, he offered a blueprint for HEIs that want to improve their Black male retention strategies. He stated that there must be “thoughtful reflection before a HEI could implement any actions regarding retention” (p. 5). Tinto (2012) focused on the fact that there is no “one size fits all” retention intervention that could be implemented by a HEI and stressed the “number of retention programs matters less than where the retention programs are situated in the educational life of the institution and how they are organized and aligned to one another” (p.6). Tinto (2012) also stated “merely investing in retention programs does not mean taking retention seriously” (p.7). Tinto (2012) also stated that “to promote a greater degree completion, institutions must adopt the student perspective and ask not only how they could act

to retain their students but also how they should act so that more of their students want to persist to completion” (p.9). Finally, when discussing the connection between retention plans and the involvement of members of the university community, Tinto mentioned:

Student success does not arise by chance. Nor does substantial improvement in institutional retention and graduation. It is the result of intentional, structured, and proactive policies directed toward the success of all students. Effective institutions provide a clear template for the actions of all its members, students, faculty, and staff alike. They establish structures within which various parts of the organization relate to each other and together impact student success. They address systemically each of the conditions shaping student success and do so over the full course of student progression through the institution (p.5).

Tinto’s (2012) thoughts on retention can be applied to Black male retention strategies when one considers the theme of fragmented Black male retention strategies, the theme of lack of consistent administrative support for Black male retention initiatives, and the subthemes of piecemeal support for Black male retention initiatives along with the subtheme of a reliance on student organizations to implement Black male retention initiatives. For example, Kevin, the Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at Northsun University discussed the Black male retention rates for the 42 Black male students at Northsun University and stated, “In the last two years, we did not have a Chief Diversity Office at this Institution, so we had pockets of initiatives, but they weren’t being centralized and now they are under this office.” Kevin also discussed the Black male retention rates currently at the university and said, “Black male retention rates at Northsun University were 55% year one to year two, 53% year two to three, and 44% year three to four.”

The theme of a fragmented retention strategy at the university was supported by Kevin's comments in the interview because of his use of the term "pockets of initiatives" and that the initiatives were not centralized." Kevin's comments helped to confirm that the Black male retention initiatives at Northsun University are fragmented due to the fact there was no synergy among the initiatives. Kevin commented later in the zoom interview that the Black male retention rates for Black male students from 2014 were very similar to the current ones. It is important to consider why this could be the case due to the increased funding at Northsun University for offices supporting retention strategies for students of color. When discussing the amount of money invested in retention initiatives at Northsun University, Kevin stated:

Yes, we have specific grants that have been achieved to target minorities, where they hired success coaches, financial literacy coaches, peer mentors, learning specialist, math specialist, writing specialist, all funded through grants to help minority students.

When one considers Northsun University's current Black male retention rates from year one to year four for Black male students, it can be inferred that Black male retention initiatives at Northsun University are not aligned with the ways in which Black male student persist because the Black male retention rates drop significantly from year one to year four. Although, there are factors that influence Black male retention that are outside Northsun University's control, the university must acknowledge that an issue with Black male retention initiatives at the institution exist before progress can be made. When discussing Black male retention rates, Kevin mentioned Rising Scholars as one of the main vehicles through which Northsun University focused on Black male retention without discussing the metrics that Northsun University used to determine its success in increasing Black male retention rates. For example, when discussing

what the Board of Trustees does with Black male retention data and other retention data, Kevin stated:

We present retention numbers like this to a broader leadership audience with issues of retention by race and what's going on. Not only the retention, but also drop, fail, withdrawal (DFW) rates and probation on Hispanics and Black students. Well, they talk about the type of initiatives that we can do to turn the tide. Any of those, is what I just talked about, Seeing Rising Scholars is relatively new, maybe at two years, or about year, albeit, put in place.

Although, Northsun University does seem to be attempting to address Black male retention, the affinity group, Rising Scholars at Northsun University, has not been consistently in operation at this university over the last four years. As Kevin noted, it was operable over the last two years due to multiple changes in leadership of the affinity group. Black male students at Northsun University seem to acknowledge that one of the main affinity groups tasked with Black male retention provides inconsistent support to Black male students. For example, Samuel a 20-year-old Black male student at Northsun University stated:

I always think Rising Scholars and Black Student Union (BSU) should fuse because Rising Scholars is really just for Black students. And I mean, with that, it seemed like it's been difficult for, like, that to really bounce back. You didn't even really have real meeting this year, so like there really isn't anything, like, the only thing that supports Black male student is really just academics, and it's like, is that even really supporting you if you have to reach out to them.

The disconnect between Kevin, the Director of Institutional Research, and Black male students' perception of the effectiveness of one of the main affinity groups that is used to

promote Black male retention at Northsun University can be detrimental to Black male persistence at the Northsun University because Kevin is co-chair of the University Institutional Effectiveness Committee (UIEC) at the Northsun University, which presents directly to the Board of Trustees and is comprised of faculty, staff, and students. No other staff in this research study is a part of this committee. This committee does not contain one Black male student on the committee according to Kevin. One could infer that it can be difficult for Black male voices at Northsun University regarding the effectiveness of Black male retention initiatives to be heard, if they are not represented on a committee that could provide a conduit for their voices to be heard. One could also infer that if the co-chair of the committee believes that Rising Scholars, the main student organization tasked with Black male retention, is effective when Rising Scholars is not consistently having meetings, it could be difficult for the issues regarding Black male retention at Northsun University to be addressed.

A coherent, strategic, Black male retention initiative should not be *one size fits all*, as Black male students have multiple ways of persisting that must be aligned and reflected for Northsun University's Black male retention initiative to be successful. The theme of constellation of supports and the subthemes of family support, mentorship, peer support, informal affinity groups, trusted staff members and intrinsic motivation all illustrate the importance of building trust with Black male students through consistent support. In this research study, it was apparent that Black male students at Northsun University valued consistent support from people in their support system. For example, when Tariq, a 20-year-old junior at Northsun University, had some issues with Northsun University and discussed who he could turn to for assistance, he shared:

I felt, I felt alone in the university for the most part. Uh, especially, like the Dean, the Dean's and I had trouble, as I said before, I'm not going to go too deep into it, because I had trouble before I met a Dean that was on my side, and he was a different person, he was White, he's a White man, but he was understanding of me and my situation.

Amante, a 19-year-old sophomore at Northsun University, stated:

I have some of my friends there as well, and one of them showed me one of the dances, and my other friends are checking up on me, checking up on me, asking how I enjoyed everything, if I had food.

Kasion, a 23-year-old senior at Northsun University, was asked about his supports at Northsun University, and he indicated:

As far as staff, there is one guy that I'm actually close with. He's our AD, um, his name is John Brown, I work in the school gym, and so I can go to him, like just a real calm guy, real knowledgeable about life stuff and like he keeps it, kicks it to you straightforward, okay, this is what it is. You messed up, but that's okay. Kasion: just get it up, keep working, stuff like that. So, I can go to him for sure, be pretty much the only one. As far as me having a close relationship with him and seeing him most of the time. He is pretty much one of the only Black male figures I go to.

Consistent support for Black male students helps to create a sense of belonging for these students that will assist students in persisting in college because the lived experiences of these students are validated. Rendon (1994) stated, "validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in and out of class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44). One of the most important parts of Rendon's definition of validation is its focus on the validation of students as a "process." In terms of Black male retention and support

systems, it is important for Black male students to have consistent support throughout the “process” of persisting at Northsun University. It is clear from the findings of this research study that the support systems for Black male students at Northsun University work as part of a larger “network” of supports that must be consistently nurtured to enable Black male persistence at Northsun University.

Historical institutionalized barriers to persistence were defined earlier in this dissertation as any policy, rule or practice that results in and supports a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair treatment of other based on race (Banks et al., 2019). In this context of HEIs, implicit bias can be described as bias found in the actions of college and university staff, professionals, faculty, or a lack of competency regarding a particular race or ethnicity (Allen, 1993). Black male student responses to historical institutionalized barriers to persistence at Northsun University are important because the ways in which Black male students’ responses to these historical institutionalized barriers to persistence can assist Northsun University in developing targeted Black male retention supports that can meet the academic, social, financial, and mental health needs of Black male students. The awareness of and responses to barriers to persistence theme that emerged from this research study, along with the subtheme of racial battle fatigue, is important because some Black students can respond to these historical institutionalized barriers to persistence in ways that could cause them to not be receptive to Black male retention initiatives.

Specifically, racial battle fatigue can have devastating effects on Black male persistence efforts. Racial battle fatigue describes the impact of racial microaggressions and “hostile campus racial climate” that results in psychological, physiological, and behavioral “distress” for racial/ethnic minority groups (Allen, 1993). Psychological stress due to racial battle fatigue was

defined as feeling apathetic, feeling helpless, being on guard, and being irritable. Allen (1993) indicated the physiological stressors that stem from racial battle fatigue include increased headaches, indigestion, chest pains, hives, and feeling fatigued (Allen, 1993). Behavioral stress responses due to racial battle fatigue was defined as isolation, performing poorly at work or in school, using alcohol to relax and lacking an appetite (Allen, 2007). In this research study, the findings indicated that four of the six Black male study participants exhibited two of the three signs of racial battle fatigue. Specifically, psychological stress responses of feeling apathetic and being on guard as well as behavioral stress responses of isolation or performing poorly at school. In this research study, five of the six HSI administrators described Black male students on campus as being lost, disengaged, isolated or distrustful of the commitment of Northsun University to assist them in persisting in college. Black male students who are distrustful of the commitment of Northsun University to assist them are less likely to seek support when faced with barriers to persistence, making any of the Northsun University's supports for Black male students ineffective. For example, Kasion, a 23-year-old Black male student at Northsun University, expressed his thoughts about campus climate and support for Black males at Northsun University and explained:

And it one thing to be male, you know of course they're a society, opinions about male, but for me to be Black on top of that, now it's 30 times worse. So now, no, I'm not going to get the help unless I go do it myself or I go search for it. No, I'm not going to get the certain benefits that other males that are not Black are getting. No, I'm not going to get the same support and you know, that just life, I take it, take a hit on the chin, and keep pushing.

George, a 20-year-old Junior at Northsun University discussed trying to connect with Black male students on campus:

I feel like it takes that understanding, like I said that maybe you aren't the person who can connect with him. You know that Black male who can't. So, I think, at that point, it does become a bit of a hard struggle to, like, not walk up to him and be like, Hey man, how you doing you know?

Amante, a 19-year-old Black male student at Northsun University mentioned the benefits of connecting with other Black male students on campus:

Because there are certain experiences that are shared between a group of people that other groups wouldn't understand. So, you would kind of have to like, reach out to the people who at least vaguely are familiar with what you are talking about. So, you don't feel so isolated. I feel like, and even if it's just like even if I don't relate to all of my male friends that I have, it's just like, there's a certain, like, sense of comfortability. Yeah, it's like, yeah, I don't have to like, really watch what I say, I kind of ease back, I don't need to code switch really. I'm just yes, I'm just being myself, I don't have to worry about like, oh, if I say this, will I be perceived differently or like, am I going to be seen as aggressive or anything like that.

Amante's response is especially poignant in this research study because it shows that he is very aware of microaggressions at Northsun University is on guard against them and uses his Black male friends and code-switching as a coping mechanism to deal with these microaggressions. Given the lived experiences of these Black male students as reflected in the previous quotes, Northsun University must determine how the climate of the university could be adjusted so that

Black male students like Amante do not feel like they must code-switch to feel comfortable at Northsun University.

In an article entitled, *African American Male Initiatives: Collaborating for Success*, Johnson (2014) discussed what is needed to achieve Black male retention in college and wrote: However, often overlooked is the important combination that institutional intentionality and social support play in student achievement. To positively impact the experiences of African American male students, campus communities must be clear in conveying (in word and deed) that these students feel valued, loved, and respected (p17).

The operative words from Johnson's quote that applies to this research study are "institutional intentionality" and "campus communities." In this research study, through the theme of inconsistent implementation of institutional support for Black male students and the subthemes of staff member agency and staff turnover, it was clear that the entire campus community at Northsun University was not in synergy with the student organizations or staff at Northsun University who actively supported Black male retention. Many staff members who engaged in support for Black male students saw issues that needed to be corrected and acted of their own accord. For example, Laura, the Executive Director of Academic and Learner Support, stated:

But the university itself is not expressing it through the walls, through you know, the different works of art, through the gallery, and the students have been discussing it and they do feel like things are performative. Because when it counts, we're dropping the ball. Um, in terms of, we have something called Rising Scholars, it's wonderful, but when we only have three or four, Black staff members, all female that are essentially moving in, when one leaves, or is somebody just has an overwhelming amount of work, it

really does tax how successful the group can become because it's not meeting on a regular basis. If students are not aware of it, or if it doesn't get passed on, it dies off.

Solange, the Assistant Vice President of Student Success at Northsun University, discussed whether she thought Black male students feel valued and respected at Northsun University and stated:

Yeah, I think some of the challenges are um, one, lack of Black representation and Black leadership and faculty and staff, experiencing, you know, bias and microaggressions, um feeling like their academic abilities and intelligence are questioned, um or doubted. I've heard Black males talk about not having a support system when it comes to mental health.

Finally, Leslie, the Director of TRIO, discussed Black student and Black male attendance at Rising Scholars, one of the main student organizations at Northsun University that participated in Black male retention. She shared:

I've noticed the engagement, like it's been declining. Um, Rising Scholars, we have our, meetings, its declining and it's because we had a staff member who was here, who was spearheading it and she left in December and now we have someone else doing it and um, you know, you still have your full-time job, and you know this really needs to be a full-time position. So, the numbers have declined. The last meeting we had was with four students. I don't see that student engagement there, that piece is not there. And, um, like I said, the students are also, they want to join the initiative but they're also like, what are you going to do for me? And we have to have selling points, and things we're going to give to them you know, like and you know funding.

After analyzing, the above quotes from the staff research study participants, it became apparent and important that Black male retention and support at Northsun University be the responsibility of a full-time employee so that targeted, continual assistance can be provided to Black male students. For example, one of the supports that could be provided to Black male students at Northsun University could be formal mentorship opportunities from interested staff at the university, which would fit under the responsibilities of a mentorship coordinator.

The theme of lack of consistent support from university administration and the subthemes of lack of funding and box-ticking are important, because to ensure that a Black male retention initiative is successful, there must be a system of evaluation to ensure that Black male retention initiatives and strategies are implemented in a way that increases their efficacy. In this research study, it was clear that although Northsun University was aware of Black male retention issues, there was no criteria to assess whether the existing Black male retention strategies and efforts were successful. For example, Amy, the Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Northsun University, stated the following when asked about at what point Northsun University attempted to provide support for Black male students:

Our office is new, the other Director of the office has only been with the university a year and a half, maybe two, Um and so, as of that, that's when, we've been started. That's when we started, you know, launching all these different things, and being more intentional about things.

When asked about what aspirational goals she thought might help increase Black male retention, Amy simply stated, "Dedicated resources."

Kevin, the Director of Institutional Research, when discussing how the university tracks who is attending Rising Scholars, the main student organization that supports Black male student retention, stated:

We're tracking activities, not only tracking activities, but linking activities and participation to retention. So, I could do an approach where I could see what's the retention of African American students that have participated in Rising scholars versus those that have not.

When asked if he had the data he referred, Kevin said, "No because we have just started out."

Solange, the Assistant Vice President of Student Success, discussed how mentorship programs could benefit Black male students:

I see a lot of these programs on LinkedIn and a lot of the stuff that they're doing. Um and it just seems like, There's a lot of dedication and effort. Um, very intentional programming. Um and you see the participation, you see the pride in the students that are in those programs. Um, so I definitely think it comes to retention and we don't have that.

Laura, the Executive Director of Academic and Learner support discussed Black male mentorship initiatives at Northsun University:

Like, we do have Black male faculty that take it upon themselves to meet with students on a regular basis. Sure. Um do we have Rising Scholars that has a high population of Black male students in it? Yeah. But are we making a concerted effort to create mentorship opportunities in the same way? Not in the same way.

It was clear, after analyzing quotes from the administrative research study participants interviewed in this study, that there is not consistent, intentional support for Black male retention initiatives at the university. It is important to note that without synergy between all components

of the university community, it can be difficult to align Black male retention initiatives to the methods and support systems that Black male students use to persist at the Northsun University. In the next section, Goings' (2021) BMALST is applied to the study findings to determine if there is alignment between the support systems and coping strategies that Black male students used to persist at Northsun University and Black male retention strategies that Northsun University used to support students' persistence in college.

Application of Theoretical Framework

Goings (2021) developed the BMALST as a lens to examine the experiences of Black male adult learners in higher education and the impact of different learning environments on their academic success. One of the central tenets of the (BMALST is the notion that Black male adult learners succeed in higher education due to individual characteristics and environmental influences. Specifically, the notion that Black male adult learners develop a "scholar identity" that influences their success and that the environments of a Black male adult learner influence the development of this scholar identity and their academic success. With this theory, Goings' (2021) synthesized decades of research on how Black male student persist in college and provided a visual representation of the collaborative role of the student, the institution, and society in Black male persistence and retention.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the Scholar Identity Model (SIM) (Whiting, 2014) represented the ways in which individual Black males persist in college. The Institutional Environment represented the ways in which the institution's Black male retention initiatives, campus organizations and campus environment worked together to support the persistence strategies of Black males. The institutional environment also represented the ways in which the Black male retention initiatives, campus organizations, and campus environments, interconnect

with individual Black male persistence strategies. Finally, the societal African Diaspora represented the importance of building cultural affinity groups on campus to celebrate the culture of Black males and to help form bonds that will assist Black males in persisting in college.

The findings of this research study indicated that there was not a great degree of overlap, as indicated in Figure 1, between the institutional environment (Northsun University), the SIM (Whiting, 2014), or the strategies that Black male students used to persist. However, Northsun University provided some assistance to Black male students in the form of peer groups and a small number of supportive staff. As a result, Black male students in this research study needed some assistance from Northsun University to persist in college and would have had great difficulty persisting at Northsun University without any assistance from the institution. For example, all six Black male research participants at Northsun University mentioned a staff member at Northsun University, peer groups at Northsun University, or a student organization that assisted them in persisting. One of the reasons why there was not a great degree of overlap between the institutional environment and the SIM at this institution was due to the lack of consistent support from the institution regarding Black male retention and the lack of an organized, strategic, collaborative plan from Northsun University regarding Black male retention. The societal African diaspora part of the BMALST model, which focused on building cultural affinity groups on campus to celebrate the culture of Black males and form bonds was not well represented in this research study. This was due to the fact that the informal affinity groups that Black males developed on their own would fit into the category of peer groups that are a part of the institutional environment and there was no formal celebration of Black male culture through the formation of Northsun University created formal affinity groups. Lastly, the BMALST includes a unified, coherent, visual model of Black male retention that was not

prevalent in this study after analyzing the interview data of the six Black male students and six Northsun University staff. The misalignment between the BMALST theory and the result of this research study indicate the importance of decision makers at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) realizing that Black male retention efforts at the HEI must align with the daily experiences of students attempting to persist at the HEI. The campus environment of the HEI must actively support retention initiatives in an intentional way. Finally, the HEI must attempt to align retention efforts to the actual ways that students persist at the HEI to make measurable, meaningful progress towards increasing Black male retention.

Significance of Study

The current national college completion rate of Black males is 36.4%, despite the myriad of interventions designed to increase this completion rate (NCES, 2022). The findings of this research study confirm the findings of earlier research studies on the importance of Black male students and HEIs serving as partners in Black male retention. This research study also confirms the powerful role that representation and mentorship can serve in assisting Black male retention that other researchers emphasized. Representation in this research study was impactful when Black male students could relate to the background and experiences of the staff or peer mentor. This research study also highlights the importance of the type of an institution that a Black male student chooses to attend. Black male students often look to HSIs when considering college choices due to a reputation of HSIs possessing a diverse student body and offering a welcoming supportive environment for Black male students. Many students in this research study experienced similar campus environments as Black male students at PWIs as described in other research studies (Harper, 2015). However, many Black male students in this research study persisted with assistance from their family, peers, faculty, and staff at Northsun University.

HEIs, specifically HSIs, must address what parts of their campus community cause Black male students to feel unwelcomed or undervalued, which affects their sense of belonging and persistence at the institution. This research study highlights an opportunity for a HEI to harness the lived experiences of Black male students in the assessment, revision, and implementation of their Black male retention initiatives and a chance to use existing resources, such as peer groups and student organizations, to help Black males persist in college.

This research study also confirmed the importance of creating a sense of belonging for Black male students through intentional consistent actions that emphasized Northsun University's commitment to Black male retention. The findings echo the findings of other researchers who highlighted the role that everyone in the university community plays in creating a sense of belonging. For example, Strayhorn (2012) found that a sense of belonging can come from peers, teachers, faculty, family members, social and academic groups, and living and learning environments. Musues (2014) found that the sense of belonging of college students can be affected by access to individuals that mirror their background and experiences as well as ongoing validation of their background and identities. In this study, a sense of belonging for Black male students was created for Black male students through interactions with the university community. For example, many of the students in this research study gravitated towards members of the university community with whom they shared common backgrounds and experiences, such as peers, Black male faculty, Black staff, and staff who validated and understood them.

This research study also helped to highlight the importance of consistency of support for Black male students, as many students in this research study were open to assistance from the institution but were cynical that assistance would be provided. The research studies that preceded

this research study, highlighted the importance of mentorship, peer mentoring, and institutional support for Black male persistence but those initiatives were seen as supplements to existing Black male persistence methods. This research study highlights the importance of constructing a strategic, collaborative retention plan that includes regular consistent input from all members of the university community, staff, students, professors, admissions representatives, advising, student affairs professionals, and student organizations. When Black male retention initiatives rely on a few, caring staff or one office to implement these initiatives, it can lead to burnout and inconsistent support for Black male students. In a sense, when Black male students form bonds with caring staff, that bond is broken when that staff member leaves the university. Also, if one office of the university is tasked with Black male retention, Black male retention can be treated as an “add-on” instead of a priority. On the other hand, if a Black male retention initiative was ingrained into the fabric of the university, Black male students would have multiple staff members who could support a Black male student if a trusted staff member leaves the university. Black male students would have multiple university offices that facilitate Black male retention. It was noteworthy that many Black male retention initiatives were not created in a way that involved reflection upon the methods that Black male students use to persist.

There was no regular monitoring of the effectiveness of Black male retention initiatives and most of the implementation of Black male retention initiatives were relegated to one specific university office and student organization that did not have consistent leadership. Many students noticed the lack of commitment to Black male retention initiatives and devised ways to persist at Northsun University despite a lack of assistance from Northsun University. The stated desire of many Black male student participants in this research to participate in the construction and implementation of Black male retention initiatives provided Northsun University with an

opportunity to reflect upon current Black male retention initiatives and partner with Black male students to create a Black male retention plan that is strategic, collaborative, and more closely aligns with the support systems and coping mechanisms that Black male students use to persist.

Implications for Practice

I believe that the results of this research study highlight four major implications for practice at HEIs, which are: (a) assessment of current Black male retention strategies and initiatives with input from the university community; (b) revising Black male retention strategies and initiatives after feedback from the university community; (c) implementing revised Black male retention strategies and initiatives with targeted roles and responsibilities for staff, faculty and students as well as an understanding of how these roles contribute to Black male retention initiatives and strategies; and (d) creation of a system of evaluations that measures the efficacy and alignment of Black male retention strategies and initiatives with current Black male student needs. Since one of the first steps to creating a strategic collaborative Black male retention initiative at a HEI is to first assess the current effectiveness of the HEI's current Black male retention initiative, this goal must be accomplished in an intentional and collaborative manner. This goal could be accomplished by creating a university committee dedicated to assessment, construction, implementation, and evaluation of the HEI's Black male retention initiatives. This HEI committee could include the following members of the HEI:

- Trustee members
- Provost or Assistant Provost
- Members of the Admissions Office
- Faculty
- Black male students

- Academic Advising
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office
- Financial Aid
- Student Retention Professionals
- Representatives from Teams in the Athletics department

The construction of the HEI committee dedicated to Black male retention represents a holistic effort to create Black male retention initiatives that can effectively align with the way that Black male students persist and include a collaborative group of members of the HEI's community that will signify that Black male retention is an issue that is being addressed in a way that can lead to sustained success for the retention of Black male students at the HEI. This committee would meet regularly at a convenient time for committee members. After the current state of Black male retention at the HEI was assessed, a plan of action to improve Black male retention could be developed.

As previously discussed, the strategic implementation of a Black male retention initiative or strategy is important for that strategy or initiative to be successful. The strategic implementation of a Black male retention strategy or initiative could be achieved through a visual representation of the connection between the various offices at the HEI involved in Black male retention strategies and initiatives. For example, there could be a diagram that details the supports that could be provided to Black male students in their first through fourth year of college based on feedback the university committee discussed above. These supports would be ingrained into the functions of offices like admissions, academic advising, financial aid, athletics, student services, and various student organizations. It would be clear which staff member in these offices would focus on Black male retention.

Next, to ensure the efficacy of revised Black male retention initiatives and strategies, there must be a focus on the creation of a system of evaluation with clear criteria to ensure that Black male students' needs align with the newly revised Black male retention strategy. For example, a system of evaluation could track how many Black male students take advantage of one retention strategy as compared to another retention strategy. A system of evaluation could track if Black male students' need for support from the HEI, evolve from the first year of the Black male persistence journey compared to the fourth year of this journey. Finally, a system of evaluation could track the awareness of Black male students about supports from the HEI and gather feedback on how they learned about existing supports that they have taken advantage of. One can acknowledge, that even a perfectly collaborative, intentional Black male retention strategy is not guaranteed to meet the needs of every Black male student at a HEI, because some factors that affect Black male retention are outside the control of the university. However, it can also be true that a Black male retention strategy created, implemented, and revised with input from Black male students and the university community will be more aligned with the persistence methods and needs of Black male students at a HEI than a Black male retention strategy created without such input.

Recommendations for Additional Research

Researchers determined that Black male students use a variety of methods and support systems to cope with obstacles to persisting in college (Brooms, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021a, 2023b; Harper, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2018; Reddick, 2012). However, since the dissertation study was conducted at a small, private university in the Northsun University, it was more practical to trace the effects of Black male retention efforts and their effects on Black male persistence. One of the limitations of this study was the sample size of Black male students and administrators. It

would be important to research the effectiveness of Black male retention efforts at larger, private, or public 4- year universities and their alignment with the support systems and coping mechanisms of Black male students. For example, it could be worth researching whether a certain support system for Black male students would be more prevalent and connected to an HEI's Black male retention plan at a larger, public, or private university. It would also be important to research if it is possible to have a centralized, aligned, holistic Black male retention effort at a larger public university considering the possible difficulty in communication between various offices of a larger public university. One must also consider the fact that a public university could have access to more funding to expand Black male retention initiatives compared to a private university. Also, there could be more factors that could affect Black persistence at a larger public or private university, such as ability to form affinity groups and form important peer and staff relationships. Another limitation of this research study was that it only investigated the experiences of traditional students at Northsun University, attempts to recruit nontraditional Black male students were unsuccessful. It would be important to research if Black male non-traditional student have similar support systems and other coping strategies when confronted with obstacles to persistence when compared to traditional Black male students. One could investigate the alignment and congruence of a Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Black male retention strategies and efforts with the unique needs of Black male non-traditional students at an HEI.

Nationally, HEIs expanding supports for Black male students could meet political resistance. It is also worth noting that Black male retention does not happen independent of other societal issues. The Supreme Court's recent affirmative action decision eroded support for many diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at college and universities. Some critics of diversity,

equity, and inclusion argue that Black male retention initiatives could be seen as providing “special” treatment for Black male students as compared to other students. It would be worthwhile to pilot a study that can gauge support for Black male retention initiatives at HEIs to see if fear of reprisal is an obstacle impeding the effective implementation of Black male retention initiatives.

Conclusion

Black male student retention levels at colleges and universities have been a cause for concern for HEIs for the past 40 years. Researchers recognized the unique ways that Black male college students persisted as well as the use of Black male retention strategies and initiatives to assist Black males in persisting (Goings, 2016; Goodwill et al., 2022; Otley & Ellis, 2019; Roach, 2001). Much of the research over the last 20 years focused on the ways in which Black males reacted to the Black male retention initiative or strategy that was used by a HEI at any given point and time. However, despite the efforts of many colleges and universities in the United States, and the research that supports the unique strategies and support systems Black male college students use to persist, the current national Black male college completion rate stands at 36.4% (NCES, 2022). Although Black males are enrolling in college, they are not completing college.

There is a disconnect between the stated purpose of Black male retention strategies used at HEIs and their implementation and evaluation, despite the successes some HEIs had with increasing Black male retention at a particular institution. It is also apparent that it can be difficult to “import” a Black male college retention strategy from one college or university to another college or university due to the multitude of factors that can affect Black male college retention at a particular public or private HEI. As a result, one salient approach to Black male

college retention is to realize that it is a unique phenomenon tailored to the specific Black male students that are present at a HEI. If an institution accepts the fact that Black male retention is unique to its students, it can assess the effectiveness of pre-existing Black male retention initiatives and strategies by gathering feedback from current Black male students and staff about their experiences with persistence and retention at the HEI.

As this phenomenological research study demonstrated, in many instances the support systems and coping strategies that Black male students use to persist in college and overcome barriers to persistence, do not reflect, align with, or interconnect with the Black male retention strategies that HEIs use to aid Black male student persistence. The disconnect between *assumed* persistence strategies and *actual* persistence strategies of Black males can lead to Black male college retention strategies that do not truly address the needs of Black male students at HEIs simply because they are misaligned. Some Black male college students are forced to compartmentalize the historical institutionalized barriers to persistence in a way that allows them to seek peer, familial, and community supports outside the HEI or from a few “trusted” staff members. This can lead to silos of support for Black male college students that are not connected in a meaningful way as well as Black male college students feeling alone, cynical, and unwilling to seek needed supports. Black male retention strategies that are the responsibility of the entire university community will be more coherent and help to create welcoming college environment that will aid in Black male college retention and persistence.

The researcher proposes the following four main causes of misaligned Black male college retention strategies: (a) lack of consultation with Black male students about retention efforts and strategies; (b) Black male retention strategies not implemented consistently; (c) Black male retention strategies not aligned with the evolving needs of Black male students; and (d) existing

Black male retention strategies and efforts not assessed and revised regularly using a coherent, cohesive system of evaluation.

As discussed above, one of the root causes of a misaligned Black male retention strategy at a HEI is the fact that many Black male students are not consulted in the reflection, preparation, execution, and assessment of current and past Black male retention strategies and efforts. Feedback from Black male students regarding Black male retentions strategies and initiatives could be obtained through focus groups, surveys, and consultation with Black male student leaders.

A focus group is defined as a structured discussion with a small group of people, moderated by a facilitator to generate data on a specific topic of interest using open-ended questions (Masadeh, 2012). One of the benefits of the use of focus groups in qualitative studies is that focus groups can provide detailed insights into a target audience's perceptions and motivations as well as capture the complexities, thoughts, and behavior of a target audience (Ulin et al.,2005). Since Black male students would have multiple thoughts, perceptions and opinions about Black male retention initiatives and strategies at a HEI, a focus group would help garner feedback that could lead to a Black male retention strategy that addresses a wide spectrum of Black male student needs.

Black male retentions initiatives and strategies could also be obtained through a Likert scale questionnaire to measure feelings and attitudes (Barua, 2013). For example, Black male students' feelings and perceptions of Black male retention may not be able to be captured by a survey with yes or no questions. A Likert scale questionnaire will allow Black male students to express their perceptions of Black male retention efforts and strategies in a way that will allow higher education staff to measure the intensity of their responses to certain questions, which in

turn can help produce themes about Black male student satisfaction with current Black male retention efforts at a HEI. Likert scale surveys can also allow for the collection of a wide variety of data about Black male retention in a convenient, streamlined way.

Finally, Black male student leaders can serve an important role in Black male retention because they can help encapsulate what some Black male students may be thinking and feeling regarding Black male retention efforts and strategies at a HEI. For example, Tinto (1993) found that student organizations play an important role in social integration which directly impacts student retention. In relationship to Black male retention, Black male student leaders in student organizations may be able to help HEIs gain insight into Black male student experiences with microaggressions and other stereotypes that could be present at a HEI. Based on feedback from Black male student leaders, a university or college could design Black male retention strategies and initiatives that create a welcoming environment for Black male students.

The second cause of misaligned Black male retention strategies and efforts at a HEI could be that many Black male retention initiatives and strategies are not consistently used over time in a meaningful way. For example, as this research study demonstrated, some Black male retention strategies are often the focus of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. In many colleges and universities across the country, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices are being downsized or eliminated (Wood, 2023). One could ask that if Black male college retention strategies and efforts at HEIs became the domain of one office of the university, what happens to the consistency of support for Black males at these institutions once those offices are eliminated?

The third cause of a misaligned Black male retention strategy at a HEI is that the needs of Black male students enrolled at a particular institution evolves from year to year. As a result, a Black male retention strategy that could meet the needs of one Black male student in a given

academic year may not meet the needs of a different Black male student in an upcoming academic year. As a result, if a HEI offers a wide menu of Black male retention resources available to a student consistently from the moment that a Black male student matriculates, until the moment a Black male college student graduates, the HEI could meet the needs of a particular Black male student. In practice, this means that a HEI could offer peer support groups, peer mentoring, faculty mentoring, mental health services, and a wide variety of other supports specifically targeted to Black male students. Although, the supports are not an exhaustive list of supports for Black male students, it could represent a starting point for a menu of options that a HEI could offer to Black male students.

Finally, Black male retention strategies at a HEI must constantly be revised, based on feedback, to measure the effectiveness and alignment of these strategies with the ways that current Black male college students persist. Revision of Black male retention strategies based on feedback must be revised with the input of the entire university community at regular intervals in the academic calendar, which will allow for Black male retention strategies to be applied at the HEI in a consistent manner and for changes to be made quickly to improve strategies that are ineffective. HEIs must understand that Black male student voices can transform Black male retention strategies and efforts at the HEI because many Black male students have lived experiences that can offer insight into why a particular Black male retention strategy may not be effective. The insight that Black male students can provide HEIs about retention strategies can be instrumental in ensuring the longevity and adaptability of Black male retention efforts at the HEI, despite a changing political, social, and economic environment.

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Appendix A: Black Male Student Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little about your personal background including where you were born as well as your major and year in school.
2. Please discuss why you attended this university and how you feel about your choice of this university right now? Please explain what has contributed to these feelings.
3. Do you believe it is important to engage with other students at this university?
4. What makes you feel valued, respected, and connected to others at this university?
5. If you have ever felt that you did not fit or belong at this institution, please describe the experience or events that led to these feelings?
6. What are some challenges you have faced as a college student and what supports do you have to face these challenges?
7. Are you aware of any academic or social support that the university offers for Black male students? Have you chosen to take advantage of the support offered? Why or why not?
8. Who can you talk to on campus who understands your experiences as a Black man or is a person with whom you can discuss those unique concerns?
9. How have your family or friends from home helped you to overcome challenges you may face in college?
10. How has this university created a welcoming and supportive environment for Black male students and how could they improve these efforts? In what ways do you feel the university has demonstrated that they are listening to the concerns of Black male students?
11. Please discuss your primary motivation for attending college and what would graduating college mean for your personal success.
12. Please discuss who in your life could be seen as a mentor or person you could turn to for help and advice.
13. Do you feel it is important to connect with other Black male students on campus?

Appendix B: Staff Interview Questions

1. Please discuss a little about your professional and academic background, where did you go to college and your professional appointments before your current job?
2. Please discuss your role at the university and your involvement in supports for Black male students.
3. Please discuss some of the challenges Black male students at the university face and some of the ways that your department or program assist Black male students in overcoming the challenges they may face.
4. Do you feel that initiatives targeting the retention of Black male students have been successful? Please discuss, in your opinion, some reasons these initiatives have been or have not been successful.
5. Are supports offered by the university regularly taken advantage of by Black male students, where do you see opportunities in outreach or participation here?
6. What specific initiatives at this university work to create a sense of belonging for Black male students?
7. How does the university ensure Black male students are aware of resources, support programs aimed at ensuring that they persist to graduation?
8. How does the university ensure consistency from admissions to graduation in its outreach to Black male students to assist them in persisting in college?
9. What do you feel are the most important resources needed for Black male students to persist in college and how is your university providing these resources and making sure the right students have access to them?
10. Please discuss similarities or difference in the challenges that Black male students may have faced in the past to the challenges they currently face.

11. In what ways do you feel university administration could partner with Black male students or Black male student leaders to improve retention Black male student retention initiatives?

12. How does or how could your university partner with the immediate community to support Black male student persistence until graduation?

13. Do you believe Black male mentorship initiatives can help in the retention of Black male students? Does the university currently have any Black male mentorship initiatives to aid Black students?

Appendix C: Tables

Table 1

Black Male Student Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Age	Academic Classification	Major	Extracurricular Activity
Kasion	23	Senior	Exercise Science	Rising Scholars
Dante	21	Junior	Sports Medicine Administration	Basketball, Rising Scholars, BSU
George	20	Junior	Exercise Science	Track, Resident Assistant
Samuel	20	Sophomore	Communication	Campus Ministry, Rising Scholars
Tariq	20	Junior	Computer Science	Lion Club for Computer Science Majors
Amante	19	Sophomore	Nursing	American Red Cross, Rising Scholars

Table 2*Northsun University Staff Demographics*

Pseudonym	Years at Northsun University	Position at Northsun University
Laura	20	Executive Director of Academic Student Support
Amy	10	Assistant Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Leslie	2	Director of TRIO
Solange	4	Assistant Vice President of Student Success
Katy	20	Department Chair Communications
Kevin	17	Director of Institutional Effectiveness

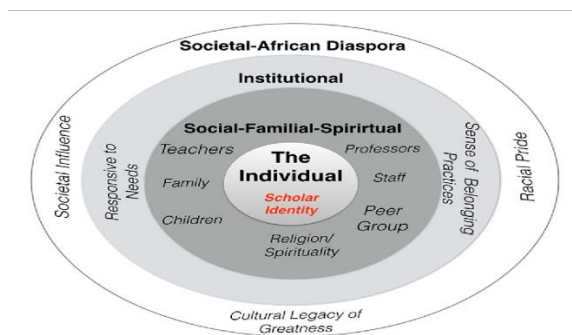
Table 3*Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme
Fragmented Black Male Retention Strategies	Limited Support
Constellation of Support Systems	Reliance on Student Organization Family Support, Caring Faculty Member, Mentorship, Intrinsic Motivation, Coaches, Community Support, Friends, Informal Affinity Groups, Student Organization
Awareness of and Responses to Barriers to Persistence	Hopelessness, Determination, Disengagement, Dejection, Despondence, Racial Battle Fatigue, Cynicism
Inconsistent Implementation of Institutional Support	Staff Member Agency, Disconnected Institutional Support, Staff Turnover
Lack of Consistent Support from University Administration	Lack of Funding, Box-Ticking, Performative Support

Appendix D: Figures

Figure 1

Black Male Adult Learner Success Theory (BMALST)



Note. Goings' (2021) Black male adult learner success theory. Reproduced with permission from author.