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A qualitative exploration of social capital and its influence on baccalaureate degree completion of first-generation African American men at the University of Louisville.

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A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ITS INFLUENCE
ON BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION OF FIRST-GENERATION
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

By

Joseph Marshall Goodman III
B.A., Chicago State University, 2007
M.P.A., Indiana University Northwest, 2010
M.Ed., University of Louisville, 2013

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A Dissertation Approved on 4/22/2024

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DEDICATION

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to my loving, hardworking and resilient mother,

Jurlean Boyd Goodman who has been my persistent academic coach. From the time when

I was a youngster, without hesitation you have conscientiously taught, encouraged and

inspired me to hold the pursuit of lifelong education in the highest regard. I love you Ma!

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To Mary Calhoun Maxwell, my sister from another mister, whereas our parallels confirm we were destined to be colleagues at Kentucky State University. Your elder sister 'Gloria' shares the same name as my oldest sister, with the month and day of her birth being identical to mine. Your son's middle name 'Joseph' corresponds with my first name and your brother's birthyear is the exact year of mine. Not to mention you and I

having been dubbed as Mary and Joseph, the biblical twins. We are forever linked, and I thank you for your unwavering support.

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In conclusion, I genuinely thank every college student across the spectrum of identities, whom I will forever cherish the mandate and privilege of serving. As I have gleaned from the expanse of your knowledge and from the depth of your compelling life experiences, I will continually revere and amplify the legitimacy of your profound voices.

ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ITS INFLUENCE
ON BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION OF FIRST-GENERATION
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Joseph Marshall Goodman III

April 22, 2024

This qualitative dissertation was designed to examine influences which various forms of social capital have on post-secondary degree attainment of first-generation individuals who self-identify as African American men. Additionally, the sample population consisted of Black men who successfully matriculated to earn baccalaureate credentials across differing academic disciplines at a public historically White institution located in the mid-south region of the United States. The research data was extracted from one-on-one, semi-structured interviews using authentic dialogue through open-ended questions. Theoretical paradigms of the study involved a phenomenological approach and an ontological philosophical assumption, integrated with critical theory, critical race theory and social capital theory lenses. The study's scope was constructed to analyze and interpret the contemporary lived experiences of African American collegiate men, and to extend the existing body of literature within the specified cognate areas. The findings which materialized from analyses of the participants' data reflected 6 themes regarding the influence of social capital on degree completion of first-generation African American men. They included: (a) resourceful college relationships, (b) co-navigators of success, (c) network benefits, (d) sense of belonging, (e) mutual trust, and (f) race-centric

encounters. Aims of the findings from this doctoral study were to provide salient

recommendations for researchers within higher education and to underscore vital

implications for secondary and post-secondary practitioners, administrators,

policymakers, as well as for institutions of higher learning.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

No community can survive being divided into opposing groups.

- Dr. Martin Luther King

Throughout the United States, African Americans are increasingly encouraged to pursue higher education to maximize career opportunities and to enhance their overall quality of life (Hill & Wang, 2015; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). These efforts are demonstrated through formal and informal mechanisms to specifically prepare Black men for seamless entry, ongoing retention, and timely completion of a post-secondary degree (Knox, 2018). Despite upward trends in support strategies within secondary and post-secondary institutions, African American men continue to lag behind other college student populations with a six-year national degree completion rate of 34 percent, compared to 64 percent for White collegians and 74 percent for Asian students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

A multitude of challenges can impede the possibility of Black men being able to efficiently and effectively navigate the college terrain (Warde, 2008). A terse listing of these factors involves a lack of adequate pre-college preparation, an absence of social and academic engagement, minimal to no support from family members, as well as strained financial resources (Chen & Hossler, 2017; Plater, 2020; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Additionally, the recurrence of marginal institutional support, which contributes to a lack of student connectedness, can inhibit the long-term academic achievement of African

American men (Davis, 1994; Oni, 2020; Tinto, 2014). An internal questioning of one's competence, termed as imposter syndrome, is another impediment which may hamper the post-secondary success of Black men (Clance & Imes, 1978; Peteet et al., 2015), along with ethnic identity development challenges and misperceptions of masculinity which may stifle the pursuit of higher education (Cross, 1991; Johns, 2007). These evidence-based obstacles can be reinforced depending upon the cultural and social environments of any college or university, especially when African American men attend predominantly White institutions (Berry, 2021; Martinez et al., 2009; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Black men who are first-generation college students may experience academic under- preparedness and a dearth of proactive guidance from family members who may not have earned post-secondary degrees, as well as feelings of aloneness due to non-affiliation with college social groups or support networks (Harper, 2012; Warburton, et al., 2001; Yan & Lin, 2005). Moreover, African American men who attend historically White institutions (HWI's) endure a higher likelihood of encountering racial bias and microaggressions, presenting additional stressors which non-Black collegians do not typically experience (Bourke & Bray, 2019; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Jones, 2017). Certain cultural expectations can sway men of color (upon completing high school) to consider employment within skilled trades rather than pursue a post-secondary degree (Anderson, 2013; Grant, 2019). The overall impact and sum of these elements can steer Black men away from higher education and may hamper the academic success of those who choose to matriculate anyway (Brooks et al., 2014; Cross & Slater, 2000; Robertson & Mason, 2008).

Problem Statement

While there are numerous studies examining bachelor's degree completion of African American men in general, there exists a gap in research literature specifically on first-generation Black collegiate men. Given the abundance of challenges and nuances which await any African American man who may be the first immediate family member to pursue a post-secondary degree, it would be quite useful to conduct a robust qualitative study on this student segment. Additionally, designing such a study with examination of social capital and its influence on bachelor's degree completion could unveil critical findings enabling secondary and post-secondary institutional leaders to better support the academic success of first-generation African American men. The implications of such a study could aid towards resolving lingering statistical disparities involving retention rates, engagement levels, sense of belonging, as well as rates of persistence and graduation for this under-supported student population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation study is to extend and broaden the existing body of literature and prior academic research, as well as gain an in-depth understanding by examining the lived experiences and influence of social capital on degree completion of first-generation African American men at the University of Louisville. Previous research studies have explored certain elements of social capital among Black men (St. John, 2013; Tabrizi, 2020; White, 2016), but did not include considerations such as first-generation status accompanied with retention and degree completion occurring at a four-year, public research university in the mid-south.

Theoretical frameworks of this phenomenological study will be expounded upon and were selected to effectively answer the research questions, as well as provide a contextual prism to analyze and interpret the data from qualitative interviews with the research participants. The philosophical alignment of an ontological approach with critical theory, critical race theory, and social capital theory lenses will enable the research questions to be coherently addressed.

Research Questions

RQ1: What aspects of social capital do African American men ascribe to their college degree completion at the University of Louisville?

RQ2: What are the experiences and perspectives involving social capital among first-generation African American men who are baccalaureate graduates from the University of Louisville?

RQ3: In what way/s did the participant's racial identity/ies affect his undergraduate college experience/s at the University of Louisville?

Assumptions

An assumption of this study is that the research participants will be amenable to voluntarily providing authentic and honest responses to a series of relevant interview questions to accurately depict, as well as interpret their thoughts, beliefs and lived experiences. Another key assumption is that my own prior professional experience and knowledge supporting collegiate African American men will not bias the data or findings of this study. Specific efforts to increase credibility and address aspects of bias are noted and described in chapter three of this dissertation study. The participants also having the

capacity to accurately recollect and express aspects of their college experiences with

social capital as a central theme is an additional assumption regarding this study.

Delimitations

This qualitative research study's delimitations involve social capital theory and

specific demographics of the participants who self-identify as African American men and

are also first-generation college graduates from the University of Louisville, a historically

White institution located in an urban sector of Louisville, Kentucky. An additional

delimitation will involve the sample size potentially consisting of six to eight recent

baccalaureate degree recipients who have successfully completed their post-secondary

studies across differing academic disciplines over the past three years.

Limitations

A limitation pertaining to this study involves a small sample size which will not

be generalizable to the larger student population, except for those who may self-identify

within this study's demographic categories. Adopting a larger sample size would likely

result in the study being more time-intensive and could yield data findings which are

materially superficial and less in-depth. Other limitations include the data being collected

over one semester and within a single institution, which means the data will not be

longitudinal and may not be pertinent to similarly situated graduates at other post-

secondary institutions. Another limitation involves purposeful sampling which will be

used in this study to ensure each participant meets the characteristics being explored.

Moreover, random sampling is a method typically used in quantitative research, and it is

not an aim of this phenomenological study. These limitations provide a context for future

research, as well as constructs for interpreting this study's data and any significant

changes to its current design would extend beyond the established boundaries and scope of this specific study.

Significance

Using the theoretical frameworks defined in chapter two, this study will address gaps and contribute to existing academic literature by examining influences which social capital concepts have on college completion and retention by exploring perspectives of baccalaureate degree earners who self-identify as first-generation African American men. Findings of this study may provide operational insights for higher education stakeholders including policymakers, funders, administrators, researchers, faculty, and staff practitioners to create and sustain equitable, as well as supportive environments for African American men who venture into the post-secondary domain.

Definitions of Key Terms

Academic Achievement Gap – distinct variations in levels of achievement between groups usually categorized by socioeconomic status, academic measures or ethnicity (Garrett, 2013).

Access – process of attaining or gaining admission into college or a university (Mugglestone et al., 2010).

Attrition – students failing to continue enrolling or discontinuing school before graduation (Beer & Lawson, 2017).

Black/African American – a United States citizen or resident having African, especially Black African ancestry (Aud et al., 2013).

Ethnicity – a designation reflecting shared customs, language, beliefs, ancestry and culture (Quintana & McKown, 2012).

First-generation – college students with parents or guardians who have not yet earned a bachelor's degree (Choy, 2001).

Matriculation – process of being actively enrolled in a university or college (Karp, 2015).

Mentoring – relational dynamic where experienced individuals share or impart knowledge, encouragement and support to a novice or person who is less-experienced (Baker & Griffin, 2010).

Historically White Institution – a college or university with White cultural norms and historically known to have majority enrollments of students with European origins (Sprull & Starling, 2021).

Persistence – a student's consistent actions or behavior towards achieving a set goal, including earning a college degree (Arnold, 1999).

Race – categorizations of persons based upon shifting views and social constructs which lack groundings in scientific facts (Hall, 1996: Holst, 2020).

Racism – social actions of oppression which reproduce discriminatory distribution or denial of esteemed or desired resources (Museus et al., 2015; Winant, 2004).

Retention – demonstrated commitment of an institution to maintain student enrollment through graduation (Sutter & Paulson, 2017).

Social Capital – shared value and resources derived from social relationships and networks, especially those within community and family interactions (Alfred, 2009; Brisson & Usher, 2005; Putnam, 2000).

Social Connectedness/Connection – identifiable involvement and sense of belonging to social institutions and desired relationships (Karcher, 2001).

Summary

Chapter one of this dissertation study provided a synopsis on historical challenges and structural disparities experienced by first-generation Black men who enroll within post-secondary institutions to pursue a baccalaureate degree. Additional chapter content included descriptions on the research problem, purpose of the study, assumptions, delimitations, limitations and significance of the study. The remaining topical sequence of this research dissertation involves chapter two providing a review of existing literature describing theoretical frameworks and interpretive lenses utilized in this study, as well as reviews of literature on social capital, first-generation students and collegiate experiences of Black men. Chapter three describes the formal design of the research study and expounds upon the qualitative methods employed to successfully conduct and complete the study. Chapter four will ultimately present a thorough analysis of the findings derived from data collected directly from this study's research participants. Chapter five, the last section of the dissertation study will provide a conclusive summary of the research findings with opportune recommendations for higher education administrators and post-secondary stakeholders, along with constructive implications for future academic research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of existing literature regarding the topics and

cognate areas of this qualitative study to explore social capital and its relative influence

on baccalaureate degree completion of first-generation African American collegians, with

specific emphasis on Black men who are college graduates. Extant literature is also

reviewed on various experiential phenomena related to college retention of underserved

students with groundings in critical theory, critical race theory, and social capital theory

respectively. Additional theoretical frameworks which formulate the analytical scope and

contextual boundaries of this study will be examined using the lens of an ontological

philosophical assumption accompanied with a phenomenological research approach. The

designated characteristics of this review and overall research study aim to bring attention

to the breadth of this subject matter and also address any present gaps within academic

literature.

Literature Search Strategy

A series of scholarly databases and search engines were accessed to identify

relevant peer-reviewed journal articles and academic subject matter which aligns with

this research study. The specific databases which were utilized digitally include:

Academic Search Premier, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC),

EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Journal Storage (JSTOR), Project MUSE, ProQuest

Dissertations and Theses, PsychInfo and SAGE Knowledge. Research terms, phrases or keywords utilized in the literature search included, but were not limited to: *African American college student experiences, college persistence and retention of Black men, critical theory, critical race theory, degree completion and graduation of Black men, first-generation college students, ontological, social capital theory* and *phenomenology*. The literature review's fundamental objectives are to critique and analyze scholarly research which coincides with this study and identify terminology or language to assist with interpretation of the participants' data.

Ontological Philosophical Assumption

Given the qualitative nature of this research study, I chose an ontological paradigm which will be threaded within aspects of my study design, data collection, analyses, and will frame the forthcoming written interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2007). Ontology's philosophical assumption is grounded in the 'study of being' and exploration of one's beliefs (Crotty, 1998). This ontological perspective also involves understanding the structure or nature of reality, as well as investigating what kind of world one exists within (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). My intention is to accurately investigate and project the research participants' meaning-making and experiential perspectives, framing and analyzing them within the study's scope and characteristics of its design. Moreover, considering the context of my designated research questions, ontology is the most suitable choice amongst the range of philosophical assumptions to disclose answers which fulfill the qualitative aims of this research study (Creswell, 2013).

The feedback of each individual participant from this study will be analyzed to identify any shared themes or similar views which may emerge from the data.

Additionally, varied perspectives which differ among the interviewees will also be

reported, analyzed and expounded upon, as the concept of multiple realities is a

fundamental component within the ontological paradigm (Ahmed, 2008). Individuals

from any given identity group are not homogenous or monolithic, and thus, neither are

their perspectives about the selfsame phenomena they may simultaneously experience.

Multiple viewpoints which are not one-dimensional can illuminate elements of diverse

truths and may potentially lessen occurrences of researcher bias in this research project

(Hill et al., 1997). It is my intention to examine any varying perspectives or multiple

realities which may be expressed through the interviewees' words, thoughts, feelings or

reactions by giving notable attention to differing or conflicting viewpoints (Creswell,

2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Conceptual Approaches and Theoretical Frameworks

  Phenomenological Research Approach

   This qualitative study will be conducted using a phenomenological research

approach to explore and acquire an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences

regarding a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). By conducting open-ended, semi-

structured interviews with the research participants, their authentic responses will provide

the data to perform a reflective analysis and unmask the true essence of their common

and unique experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This descriptive approach is considered a

research paradigm and a philosophy to depict consciousness, as well as elements of

experiential meaning and was initially created in the 1890's by the German philosopher

Edmund Husserl (Reiners, 2012; van Manen, 1990; Wertz, 2005). The structure of a

phenomenological method will enable predominant and differing themes to emerge from

the data stemming from the participants' perspectives to adequately address the study's research questions (Patton, 2000; Simon, 2011; Todres & Holloway, 2004).

The engaging and interactive communication approach involving phenomenology requires the researcher to welcome genuine and respectful two-way conversations to prompt meaningful reflections from the individuals participating in a research study (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012; van Manen, 1990). A mindset of openness, fluidity and sensitivity will allow the researcher to listen intently, comprehend and capture the language which describes realities of the world participants have experienced (Creswell, 2007; Kezar, 2004). The sum of these analytical observations and exploratory approaches can explicitly illuminate any unexplored perspectives, behaviors, feelings and beliefs, as well as provide a range of counternarratives and counterstories not previously investigated or unearthed (Koltz & Feit, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Roberts, 2010). Stringent and rigorous efforts will be undertaken by the qualitative researcher to ensure the findings represent ethical interpretations possessing a systematic grounding within the data (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006).

A phenomenological research approach is also most suitable for this study, given the nature of the research problem, coupled with the designated procedures to thematically analyze and interpret the phenomena of social capital and its influence on degree completion of first-generation African American men (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016; Morgan, 2011). A case study approach was not adopted, as an intensive individual case-based study over an extended time period is not the aim of this research design (Glesne, 2016). The grounded theory framework is not being considered because the investigatory goal is not to develop a new or emergent theory (Creswell, 2013). A

narrative approach is not applicable, given it is not the researcher's interest to create biographical sketches or historical narratives through this study (Glesne, 2016). The ethnography genre is not relevant, due to non-consideration for long-term immersion and non-interest for extended observation encounters with the participants (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, a quantitative approach will not be utilized, as the statistical survey method is not congruent with this study's focus towards eliciting the research participants' perspectives and elaborating on their lived experiences (Miles et al., 2014).

Critical Theory Interpretive Framework

A critical theory framework was chosen for this research study given its origins in social sciences involving psychology, sociology, and philosophy derived from generations of German philosophers who were affiliated with a theoretical tradition known as The Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, 1972/1992). The crux of this critical theory's interpretation within an educational context involves individuals transitioning out of dismal conditions which are oppressive and experiencing permanent emancipation into realities of transformation, newfound freedom, and empowerment (Lynn et al., 2006). Another key aspect of critical theory promotes the liberating concept of self-authorship, which is also directly linked to crafting one's own narrative of present realities, as well as resolutely defining one's own history (Horkheimer, 1972/1992).

Critical theory further asserts that societal structures, systemic impediments, cultural norms, social institutions, and formal as well as informal mechanisms which perpetuate constraints based upon race, class, and gender should be critiqued, challenged, and transformed (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016). The analytic function of this theory is to legitimize the lived experiences and dignity of disenfranchised persons and enact social

justice through a shared engagement of the researcher and participants (Lather, 1991; Weiss & Fine, 2004). This methodological process involves encouraging reflection and critical dialogue with the study's interviewees to explore unexamined assumptions which may reinforce habitual acceptance of learned behaviors and strictures that are oppressive by nature (Higgs, 2001; Kincheloe, 1991). These unnoticeably subtle, yet powerful assumptions can be the product of societal structures, accepted norms and practices which generate systemic distortions of reality, as well as impose an array of constraints upon marginalized populations (Apple, 1990; Freire, 2017; Glesne, 2016; Held et al., 1999).

Critical theory firmly contends that ideologies of the dominant culture intently construct language phenomena which form the foundations of knowledge that guide the collective thoughts and subsequent actions of society (Bottomore, 1983; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). It is this manufactured construction of normative value systems or what is perceived as real, that critical theory researchers are charged with examining, critiquing, challenging, and ultimately dismantling (Creswell, 2013; Higgs, 2001; Usher, 1996). When conducting a research study, critical theorists are prone to engage with, and prioritize research participants whose voices and perspectives have been historically and systematically silenced or muted, and who are from populations that have been marginalized or exploited (Maguire, 1996; Schwandt, 2007).

Researchers of this genre must function with an essence of courage to unapologetically question the status quo and utilize their power to actuate lasting change, after inducing meaningful and intensive dialogue (Madison, 2005). This requires a willingness-by-intention towards being unafraid to interrogate, examine, and grapple with

any tensions which may emerge from data that is collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Fay, 1987; Freire, 2007). The prospective tensions may appear by illuminating lived experiences and accounts of alienation and domination which occur in society and could potentially emerge from perspectives of research populations who have been socially maligned (Jay, 1973; Schroyer, 1975).

Critical Race Theory Lens

This phenomenological research study will be conducted and analyzed using the academic framework of critical race theory (CRT) to amplify and understand various structural inequities which African American men encounter during their matriculation through the landscape of higher education. Critical race theory has its origins in the 1970's, derived from a resistance movement comprised of activists and scholars who observed and concluded that civil rights gains from the 1960's were being hampered and perhaps reversed (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT specifically emerged from an established academic campaign known as critical legal studies wherein legal scholars of color were unearthing and analyzing the function of racism within the American judicial system (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Gordon, 1990).

Individuals who were the initiators of CRT felt racism was becoming more subtle and camouflaged, and thus, the voices and lived experiences of those being oppressed needed to be expressed and heard (Bell, 1987; Freeman, 1978; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patton, 2005). This was achieved through a concept called counterstories, wherein various underrepresented scholars confront and challenge prevailing narratives with counter arguments (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Martinez, 2014). These dissimilar and opposing narratives consist of alternative descriptions and lived accounts which expose

the blatant and covert acts and effects of prejudicial power and racism which are propagated by American society's dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

An early initiator and proponent of CRT was Derrick Bell, an African American civil rights lawyer and author who held a professorship at Harvard Law School. He initiated a perpetual awakening with a focus on comprehending America's racial history through concepts called interest convergence and legal storytelling (Bell, 1987; Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Consequently, Bell firmly argued that African Americans are granted civil rights gains only when interests of Black and White people converge, wherein added benefits for African Americans must be accompanied with equal or greater benefits for Whites (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Additionally, Professor Bell's creation of legal storytelling involves a probing critique of the legal system due to its abject failure to provide strategies for transformation of racially oppressive structures (Bell, 1987; Yosso, 2005). Kimberlé Crenshaw is another civil rights advocate and law professor who proudly embraces the 'outsider scholar' designation given her passion to exceed conventional boundaries of critical theory research with the inclusion of written analyses highlighting race and racism (Hill Collins, 1986). Her scholarly work to dismantle social injustices continues into the present day through the self-titled concept of intersectionality, known to illuminate differing and comingling forms of inequality which systematically affects individuals based upon race, class, gender, sexuality and immigrant status (Crenshaw, 1989; Steinmetz, 2020). Crenshaw's relentless scholarship brings particular attention to various ways Black women are continually disadvantaged, even with implementation of an array of civil rights which are oftentimes inhibited due to the patriarchal and Eurocentric functioning of American power structures (Crenshaw, 1991).

Another CRT cofounder is Richard Delgado, a university professor and critical legal scholar who has published numerous reflective papers emphasizing the potency and healing effects of counterstories, the normalcy of racism in America and the necessity for marginalized groups to name their own realities (Delgado, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The onslaught of CRT in the 1970's was a movement sweeping across the United States and the world during the post-civil rights era which included scholarly writings of a resolute White American ally named Alan Freeman (Freeman, 1978). He is deemed as a critical legal scholar who considered the judicial system as an apparatus which actually legitimizes and reinforces the oppressive social structures of class and privilege, as well as sustained marginalization of people of color (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Mari Matsuda is another early advocate of CRT who became the first tenured Asian American law professor within the United States (Matsuda, 1986). Through her writings, teachings and speeches, she became known for utilizing legal storytelling as an approach to unmask obscurities and critique elitist instructional pedagogies embedded within law school curricula (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Patricia Williams is a law professor, author and former lawyer who is named among the core of CRT pioneers and practitioners. The multitude of her published works focus on gender equity, legitimizing narratives from people of color and critically analyzing the Anglo-centric nature and unbalanced functionality of the American judicial system (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Williams, 1991). The cadre of aforementioned scholar-activists are considered the original framers of critical race theory's momentum which remains in full effect. Their tenacious aims are to expose and confront various forms of

racial oppression while informing the lens of CRT-focused analysis of the legal system, academia and other spheres of research (Williams, 1991).

Critical Race Theory in Higher Education

The concept of critical race theory has applicability to an array of contextual settings and structural environments across various spectrums of life in the United States, more specifically, within systems of schooling (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018). CRT scholars contend that race and racism are normative realities with their functioning and effects in academic settings being determined to be both factual and unquestionable (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In this field of inquiry, researchers also assert that racial inequities perpetuated within educational contexts should be countered with CRT as a theoretical movement (Carbado, 2011). Several aims of this analytical apparatus include dispelling inferiority narratives regarding people of color, with use of intersectionality to reveal how race interacts with other identities such as gender and class, as well as coupling documentation of disparities with advocating for ongoing systemic change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Hiraldo, 2010).

Since its creation in the 1970's, CRT has continued to evolve with the development of five tenets which are useful to unveil and address educational disparities (Hiraldo, 2010). The range of these core tenets include a critique of liberalism, interest convergence, Whiteness as property, counter-storytelling and the permanence of racism (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT's critique of liberalism is grounded within the notion of colorblindness which disregards racially oppressive policies and is alleged to actually enable continuation of social injustice (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Interest convergence holds that any advancements in racial

disparities are permitted only when Whites can mutually benefit from such reforms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). The concept of Whiteness as property refers to the array of tangible and intangible benefits and privileges which are entitlements to anyone classified as racially White (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018). Counter-storytelling is another tenet of CRT which welcomes narratives from people of color to legitimize their varied experiences with racial marginalization and social resistance (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Hiraldo, 2010). Regarding the permanence of racism, this tenet highlights and punctuates how societal and institutional structures sanction or tolerate various forms of sustained racial inequity, whether through overt or covert means (Hechter & Horne, 2003; Hiraldo, 2010).

The tenets of CRT were adopted as a medium to disclose how race and racism impact people of color across the terrain of higher education (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Given that outcomes and experiences within the larger society are often constricted or shaped by one's race, this fact of American life similarly manifests itself on the college campus, which is a mere microcosm where societal norms are expressed (Dixson & Lynn, 2013; Hechter & Horne, 2003). Such a realization, prompted by critical race theory, can shed light on the elements of subordination and domination which function mainly at White institutions of higher learning (Hiraldo, 2010; Patton et al, 2007).

A critical race frame of reference can serve as a catalyst for faculty members, student affairs administrators and university staff towards implementing policies and practices to address and dismantle racial inequities (Bell, 1987; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Reconstructing how programs and services are administered, as well as changes in curriculum can make academia less hostile, and more inclusive, as

well as affirming for underrepresented student populations (Hiraldo, 2010; Smith et al., 2007). CRT's framework holds that it is the institution's singular responsibility (and not the collegian's role) to create academic and racial climates which contribute to the holistic success of every student (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Patton, 2006). Achieving such ends requires giving ear and voice to the counternarratives of student populations who have been seldom heard due to being overshadowed or nullified by dominant perspectives (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Critical Race Theory & Black Men

The social construction of race is a pervasive and enduring phenomenon within the American experience, and the intersection of race-with-gender creates a range of undeniable challenges for Black men (Allen & Santos Metcalf, 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The dual factors of being a man, who is also Black while living within the United States sets the stage for incidents of random and targeted victimization through multiple forms of micro and macro-aggressions (Johnson & Strayhorn, 2022). These uninvited assaults (whether psychological or physical) are often prompted, not by anything the Black man has done, but are enacted and sustained by structural forces within society, merely due to the notion and observance of race (DeAngelis, 2009). Critical race theory provides a framework and amplified platform from which the oppression and marginalization of Black men can be pinpointed, analyzed, resisted, and disrupted (Hawkins, 1998; Stover, 2003).

Across sectors of society, African American men have been traditionally socialized to believe that true manhood involves keeping one's feelings hidden and to avoid conveying expressions which may reveal hurt, or a perception of weakness or pain

(Adams, 2019; Carelock, 2017). A misguided approach of this nature results in causing

men to suffer in silence behind a barrier where various forms of affliction can fester and

go unaddressed (Laufer, 2012; Mays, 2014). The usefulness and value of CRT

particularly with issues of race and racism, provides a

crucial mechanism for the voices of Black men to be distinctly expressed through the

concepts of counterstories and counternarratives (Jennings, 2014; Scott & Johnson,

2021).

Reversing the systematic silencing of historically marginalized individuals will

not only neutralize and destabilize dominant ideologies but can also provide cathartic and

empowering outcomes for populations that have been oppressed (Johnson & Strayhorn,

2022; Mitchell & Stewart, 2011). Enabling men of African descent to be heard with their

muted perspectives being amplified and lived experiences being affirmed can create a

pathway for racial bias to be aptly subdued and social justice to be advanced (Hargrove,

2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate). A critical race approach towards storytelling can expose

any unapparent, yet common encounters of stereotyping, criminalization and othering,

while also revealing pertinent solutions to counter these normalized inequities (Hargrove,

2014; Jennings, 2014). When researchers provide inviting and safe spaces for Black men

to vocalize their personal stories and encounters, the discourse can be elevated from the

illusion of colorblindness to the reality of being color brave (Brown, 2020; Hobson,

2014). Conducting this evidence-based research can counteract social inequities, by

identifying unmet needs to customize culturally responsive and transformative supports

for marginalized communities within and outside of academia (Mitchell & Stewart, 2011;

Morgan, 2013).

CRT's usefulness also involves countering what has been deemed as Eurocentric deficit-based narratives wherein the lives and characteristics of Black men in America are described in language and text with overtly negative connotations and subordinated assessments (Allen-Meares & Burman, 1995; Bell, 2019). This biased and flawed scholarly practice is an inflamed and palpable indication of the structural racism lurking within and across various genres of research, and it is being duly identified and challenged by scholars of color (Brown, 2020; Masko, 2008). This approach is repetitively borne out in the multitude of negative statistical reports which surface within academic environments detailing woefully glum realities involving Black men (Allen, 2015; Ayers et. al., 2001; Lawson Bush & Bush, 2018). Such disclosures of these historical and contemporary object lessons often lack detailed reporting on environmental conditions which are shaped by structural powers that consistently perpetuate the unprovoked disparities (Allen-Meares & Burman, 1995; Lynn, 2002). A critical race theory lens aims to ensure that experiential truths are amplified and reinforced along with an impetus to deconstruct and dismantle the broader societal forces which foster and sustain oppression of marginalized populations (Jennings, 2014; Morgan, 2013; Reynolds, 2010).

Social Capital Theory

Social capital is a sociology-derived theoretical framework involving the form and function of structured and informal social networks that work cohesively together to achieve an array of desired outcomes which favorably benefit individual members and the entire group collectively (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Furstenberg, 2005; Portes, 1998). Social capital in its numerous manifestations may consist of tangible and

intangible resources such as knowledge, information, finances, scholarships, beneficial

connections and supportive relationships, as well as status and privilege (Brown & Davis,

2001; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005). This phenomenon requires

social cohesion and mutual responsibilities among its members and operates within

systems of trust, norms of behavior, cooperation and good will. (Coleman, 1990; Putnam,

1995; Yosso, 2005).

There is a classic form of social capital introduced by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu

which encompasses ways that privileged classes of people achieve more advantages in

their use of social capital than those who are considered as less fortunate (Baron et al.,

2000; Lin, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2004). The interpretation of this particular social

phenomenon was described by Bourdieu as an elitist apparatus of control to strategically

ensure the ruling class remains in power, while the general population maintains a

subordinated position within society (Lin, 2001). This class-based element of social

capital also involves a concept known as network closure, where the network benefits and

affiliated power are closed to outsiders and remain exclusive to vetted members-only

(Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1998).

A sociologist and professor named James Coleman has generated a more

conciliatory description of social capital, with it being centered around membership

benefits formulated through mutual trust, relational peer connections, as well as pre-

determined expectations and obligations (Barton & Coley, 2010; Lin, 2001). This

hallmark focus on social ties and devotion to behavioral norms provides a constructive

lens which frames social capital as an inclusive pathway for all persons to pursue,

particularly when it involves the sphere of education (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman,

1990; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Putnam, 2000). When members of a particular group or network adopt this communal approach, it is deemed as a form of shared cooperation aimed at producing success and positive outcomes (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Nan Lin, a seasoned sociology professor also formulated a model of social capital which extended the approaches of Bourdieu and Coleman to include concepts that strong connections amongst members of a network may preserve internal resources, and inversely, weak ties can prompt members to access additional benefits from various other external sources (Perna & Titus, 2005). This includes notions that members of a network will often relate to constituents of a similar socioeconomic background or mindset (i.e., the homophilous concept), while some members may build outside alliances with individuals who are considered to hold a higher socioeconomic status in order to acquire access to greater resources (i.e., the heterophilous concept) (Lin, 2001). Embedded within the social capital literature are perspectives that this mechanism can increase self-efficacy and one's sense of fulfillment through mentorship, while enriching individuals' mental and physical health, as well as providing support towards employment and achievement of academic goals (Barton & Coley, 2010; Clarke, 2020; Lin, 1999).

While social capital can positively impact anyone, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender identity, it has been found to produce particularly favorable outcomes for people of color, and even more specifically for Black men (Xu & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). Within educational contexts, being an active participant of a social support network which has attributes of solidarity and reciprocity heightens the college-going aspirations and academic success of students who are Black men (Al-Fadhli & Kersen, 2010; Portes, 1998). The internal motivation factors embedded within social capital along with useful

information resources can enhance the lived experiences of its network members and aid them in transitioning into and navigating through the college landscape (Evans, 1998; Young et al., 2011). These profitable benefits are necessary, given the adverse roles that race and racism play against Black men in American society at large, which are personified in their experiences within institutions of higher learning (Carter-Francique et al. 2015; Davis et al., 2007).

Research studies have been conducted investigating the value of social capital which has been demonstrated at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU's), as well as its known benefits and capacity to function within HWI's (Brown & Davis, 2001). Black collegiate men, as reported by academic researchers have often perceived HWI's as uncaring, insensitive and accompanied with unmerited obligations of having to continually prove themselves (Fleming, 1984; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008). Recurring experiences and encounters of this nature provide sufficient justification for the theory of social capital to be further explored and applied to demolish historical disparities and prolonged adversities endured by college-going men of color (Brooms et al., 2015; Polite & Davis, 1999).

Prior research also reveals a linkage between the accumulation of social capital and emotional intelligence (EI), with EI being described as an aspect of social intelligence involving the capacity to assess one's own and others' emotions and sentiments while discerning the use of this information to manage one's thinking and behavior (Bozionelos & Bozionelos, 2018; Compton, 2016; Gardner, 1983; Zeidner et al., 2009). The development of EI is associated with promoting self-awareness, positive mental well-being, effective coping skills using psychosocial competencies, as well as

academic success among college students (Lopes et al., 2003; Moeller et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2004). Furthermore, EI can be a mechanism for Black men who are collegians to produce interpersonal skills which aid in fostering elements of social capital to develop and sustain the outcome of beneficial social networks (Compton, 2016; Goleman, 2001; Jones, 2017; Landy, 2005).

Experiences of African American College Students

Post-secondary students who are African American have the lowest rates of graduation amidst all non-majority student populations (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Brooms, 2018; Strayhorn, 2017). This continuing disparity can be attributed to the strained history between the American education system in general and Black Americans, considering the residual effects of formerly enslaved individuals being prohibited from becoming college educated, much less having been prevented from learning to read (Pawlewicz, 2022). Higher education barriers were partially removed when the second Morrill Act of 1890 was enacted, resulting in the establishment of sixteen historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU's) which were created to specifically educate African Americans (Brown, 2013; George Mwangi, 2016; Jackson, 2022). In addition to a multitude of HBCU's being instituted and flourishing in the late 1800's and beyond, African Americans also began attending majority White institutions due to passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the 1954 desegregation case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Jackson, 2022).

Once the doors of desegregated educational opportunity were initially opened for Black students at historically White institutions (HWI's), this unprecedented access came

with a persistent formation of unanticipated hurdles and challenges, particularly given the

dual maladies of race and racism which are embedded, functioning and increasing within

the day-to-day American ecosystem (Brown-Nagin, 2014; Lee, 1993; Roediger, 1991).

Prior research studies reveal that levels of academic success which are impacted by

adverse lived experiences for students of color, comparatively reflect much better

academic outcomes for non-Black collegians, while attending the self-same majority

institutions of higher learning (Harper, 2013; Sedlacek, 1987; Willie & Cunnigen, 1981).

Historical data also indicate that various institutional and programmatic efforts are often

systematically reactive, customarily delayed, structurally superficial, culturally deficient

and financially insufficient for this undersupported student population (Bryan et al.,

2015; Noguera, 2005; Stewart, 2007;).

While attending HWI's, African American collegians are more likely to endure

non-affirming interactions and hostile encounters, as well as macro and micro-

aggressions which trigger racial tensions along with distracting sentiments of stigma and

isolation stemming from racial discrimination (Chang, 2000; Fleming, 1984). Students

within this population are less likely to see or encounter faculty, staff, and administrators

of their same race or ethnicity and are more probable to receive minimal assistance from

academic advisors (Harrison & Palacios, 2014; Zhang & Smith, 2011). These conditions

fundamentally create an unwelcoming environment for students of color and can

diminish or compromise a collegian's overall sense of belonging and connectedness to

the institution, which can also undermine aspects of academic achievement (Gopalan &

Brady, 2019; Kim et al., 2018; Strayhorn, 2019). Regarding negative (non-Black) peer

interactions, Black students are less likely to be selected, included to participate or

contribute within study groups in preparation for upcoming exams, and more likely to be negatively profiled and stereotyped (McCoy et al., 2015; Solorzano et al., 2000; Wilkins, 2014). Such raced-based exclusion and bias further solidifies a sense of isolation and has negative impacts on factors involving college transition, student persistence, rates of retention and graduation outcomes (Cabrera et al., 1999; Patton, 2016).

The social construction of race for African American college students is highly complicated for collegians who may hold bi-racial or multi-racial identities (Renn, 2000). Accompanied with the challenges of fitting-in and yearning for a sense of belonging, mixed-race individuals may feel pressured to select a single race as their sole designation, versus denoting and embracing each aspect of their various ethnic backgrounds (Cortes, 2000; Kleinman-Fleischer, 2010). These college students can often feel disgraced due to one or more of their parents' relatives taking issue with the self-selection of their identity and the expressions thereof (Kleinman-Fleischer, 2010). Moreover, the Black population has grown by 30% since 2000, and the number of African Americans who identify as multi-racial or Black Hispanic has increased by 145% within the time period between 2000 and 2019 (Cox &Tamir, 2022; Moslimani et al., 2023). Research data also indicate that peer relationships and micro-cultures across post-secondary campuses play an influential role on the academic success and stages of identity development of bi-racial and multi-racial college students (Cortes, 2000; Renn, 2003).

The aforementioned challenges of perpetual racism, identity development hurdles, as well as recurring microaggressions substantiate the dire need for college preparation occurring not solely during matriculation within high school, but also consistently throughout middle school and the elementary grades (Collins, 2019; Cook, 2015; Shaffer,

2020). While there are differing perspectives about when to begin imparting college aspirations within school children, the global job market, speed of technological advancements and marginal post-secondary completion rates provide considerable justification to encourage proactive college preparation sooner rather than later (Fleming, 2011; Smitobol, 2023). It is also essential that early college preparation initiatives are implemented with a communitywide and collaborative approach to proactively ensure the academic and social needs of future collegians are effectively addressed, especially among marginalized populations (Brant-Rajahn, 2019; GreatSchools Staff, 2023; Washington, 2010).

African American Collegiate Men

Historically men of color have lagged in their pursuit of higher education due to a priority and obligation to fulfill a role of the full-time family provider within their household, as well as traditional expectations and non-degree socialization of working within the trades professions or industries not requiring a college credential (Harris, 1995; Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Students within this population are also likely to be of first-generation status who may work and live off campus, and the proximity to family and attending to a range of their needs may unintentionally affect academic outcomes (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Luke, 2017). Not living on campus can hamper the use of on-site support services while inducing a non-member image that may lessen the likelihood for Black men to interact and form meaningful bonds with collegians of their own race and among various other ethnicities and identities (Brooks, 2015; Strayhorn, 2019). Academic success can also be compromised due to the potential avoidance of relying on family members to provide financial support when needed (Luke, 2017).

African American college men are more likely to be of low-income status and hail from secondary schools which lack educational resources and thus contributing to aspects of academic underpreparedness among this particular student population (Laureau, 2002; Lewis et al., 2011; Lipman, 2010; Winfield, 1994). Socioeconomic status and personal financial stability, along with robust educational funding levels within pre-collegiate environments play a vital role in predicting college success (Cuyjet, 1997; Harmon & Ford, 2010; Mason, 1998). Although some strides have been achieved in the treatment of underrepresented students, Black men attending HWI's may be subjected to experiences ranging from repetitive invisibility to excessive scrutiny where their character and intellectual potential are continually questioned under assumptions of being admitted solely through affirmative action initiatives or due to being an athlete (Allen, 1985; Bonilla-Silva, 2010). In addition to the perception of having a non-academic persona, college-going Black men may encounter subtle and blatant forms of discrimination and marginalization by being unjustly profiled and tokenized, as well as social alienation which triggers racial anxiety from being minoritized and othered under the myth of being an outsider (Brown et al., 2005; Harper, 2013; Morgan et al., 2020; Solorzano et al., 2000; Steele, 1997).

Campus climates which are determined to be systemically unwelcoming, culturally unsupportive and non-inclusive will likely breed overt and covert inequitable conditions which not only negate Black men's positive transition into college, but also hamper their academic success and navigation across the trajectory of their entire college career (Nelson Laird & Niskode-Dossett, 2010; Smith et al., 2007; Wilkins, 2014). When this student segment perceives they do not matter and are not valued or respected, as

evidenced through their individual and collective racial encounters, then various facets of social integration, engagement, and involvement of African American men are considerably diminished (Cuyjet, 1997; Rankin & Reason, 2005). These elements contribute to low levels of satisfaction regarding their overall college experience (Campbell et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2008). When institutional environments of HWI's repeatedly present collegiate Black men with racially infused encounters and negative cues within and outside of the classroom, their psycho-social functioning can be suppressed along with emotionally detrimental effects upon their identity development and cognitive functioning (Berger & Heath, 2005; Johnson, 2020; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008).

First-Generation College Students

Parents and guardians of first-generation college students are less likely to have a college degree which may translate into minimal or no experiential assistance being imparted or received with respect to college-going information, academic coaching, or other forms of navigational guidance and involvement due to the parental absence of direct college experience (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). The first-generation classification originated around 1960 through the federal government's effort to provide tuition funding with the common description of a first-generation college student being an individual with parents or guardians who may have graduated from high school but did not complete a bachelor's degree (Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004; Shelton, 2011). These students are often from low socioeconomic backgrounds and experience aspects of under-preparedness for college, along with encountering considerable challenges adjusting to college life, hence resulting in decreased rates of

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persistence and baccalaureate degree completion (Asplund, 2009; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Palmer et al., 2014; Proctor, 2020).

Members of this population segment are usually students of color who face and endure various race-based stigmas which interfere with their sense of agency towards pursuing academic assistance, meeting with advisors or professors, interacting with their peers via study groups, as well as joining and leading student organizations (Hicks & Wood, 2016; Padgett et al., 2012; Tally, 2020). This difficulty with socially transitioning into the fabric of college life and academically integrating into higher education can stem from a compromised sense of belonging and imposter syndrome (Goward, 2018). This syndrome's effect can cause first-generation students to feel they are incapable or not worthy of completing a college degree due to the reality of being within unfamiliar territory and experiencing an abnormality (Katrevich & Arugyete, 2017; Means & Pyne, 2017).

First-generation college students are more likely to have not been sufficiently prepared at the secondary school level for the rigors and complexities of higher education due to not taking pre-college level courses nor receiving effective preparation for standardized tests toward college admissions and non-remedial course placement (Bozzetto-Hollywood et al., 2018; Hutchinson, 2017; Plunkett et al., 2016). These factors may be the direct result of attending under-resourced high schools within economically disenfranchised communities and the effects of which also playing a central role in fostering doubtful internalized conclusions about these underrepresented students' capacity to succeed in achieving their college aspirations (Azmitia et al., 2018; Green, 2006). Such a magnitude of pre-college disparities and not knowing where or how to seek

support, often translate into emotions of anxiety, low self-confidence with lingering feelings of inadequacy, and a general uneasiness among first-generation students once they have entered the post-secondary landscape (Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Saenz et al., 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

In addition to being unfamiliar with higher education's culture of autonomy, coupled with an absence of a college-going identity, non-continuing generation students are also more likely to feel their success is a mythical fabrication that will eventually be determined as an undeniable counterfeit, despite their documented academic achievements (Clance & Imes, 1978; Wang et al., 2019). First-generation college students can often have a series of conflicting challenges in their family dynamic as they typically provide monetary assistance to aid in supporting their immediate families while fulfilling other household obligations (Billson & Terry, 1982; Land & Ziomek-Daigle, 2013). Furthermore, they are likely to be employed full-time while enrolled in college to also assist with covering tuition costs or purchasing books for their courses and thus, creating an additional time constraint barrier which can negatively impact their studies (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Another impediment causing tension and stress involves developing a college-completion mindset while striving to maintain worthwhile connections with various family members who may concretely view higher education as conflicting with their family's non-collegiate historical traditions (Banks-Santilli, 2014; Irlbeck et al., 2014; O'Shea, 2015).

First-Generation African American Men

Black men who are the first in their immediate households to attend college with the goal of expanding their career possibilities will likely encounter a multitude of

opportunities and racially-based challenges upon attending HWI's (Allen, 1992; Garrett-Lewis, 2012; George Mwangi, 2016; Harper et al., 2009). America's social, historical and political chronologies have systematically deemed African American men as suspects, brutish, unintelligent, subordinated and marginalized beings with variations of these misperceptions manifesting on college campuses through microaggressions and withholding of essential supportive resources (Allen & Santos Metcalf, 2020; Ferguson, 2011; Ingram, 2013). Accordingly, historical disparities continue to persist regarding rates of retention and undergraduate degree completion, specifically among first-generation Black men who possess several intersecting identities including gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2006; Hines, et al., 2015; Huerta et al., 2013; Stoops, 2004). This unique yet common intersectionality often subjects this student segment to institutional detriments in the form of discrimination and bias due to race and gender-identity, as well as due to structural forms of classism, attributed to having a low-income background (Crenshaw, 1991; Dancy, 2013; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Strayhorn, 2013).

The regularity of subtle and obvious systemic infractions causes first-generation African American men to experience differing forms of psychological stress with a diminished sense of belonging which depletes energy, inhibits mental focus, and causes academic motivation to wane in varying proportions (Bakari, 1997; Checkoway, 2018; Hurd, 2000; Steele, 1997). This microcosm of the larger societal oppression (especially at HWI's) must be intently addressed with customized and non-superficial supports particularly given the considerable ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic differences between Black men and the institution's predominant student populations and their ingrained

misconceptions (Butler et al., 2012; Noguera, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008). Considering that underserved first-generation students are unfamiliar with the college spectrum in an environment which can be non-affirming and unwelcoming, there must be considerable programmatic resources and financial allocations from administrators to create and sustain a seamless pathway for these collegians' transition and integration (Fleming, 1984; Harper, 2013;).

First-generation African American men encounter racially conscious experiences which include expectations of being a *spokesperson* for the entire Black race during classroom group discussions, as well as *onlyness*, stemming from the psychological toll of traversing unfamiliar terrain with few or no same-race mentors or peers, along with the emotional pressure of *exceptionalism* which breeds a fear that marginal leadership performance will inhibit or prevent opportunities for African American men in the future (Harper, 2013; Harper et al., 2011; M. Davis et al., 2004). Black *exceptionalism* also places responsibility of resolving racism solely on the shoulders of those who are being oppressed, and it is undergirded with the myth that a Black person's basic humanity can only be earned by achieving unimaginable accomplishments and exceptional performance (Gassam Asare, 2021; Muhammad, 2019; Pedrick, 2023). Over time, these common occurrences can be obvious causes of emotional anxiety and *racial battle fatigue* which is a stress-related response to prolonged racially degrading, insensitive and hostile words and treatment (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Smith, 2008). Effectively addressing these effects of racial underrepresentation and adverse impacts on persistence and graduation requires a comprehensive, data-driven programmatic approach to heighten

collegiate Black men's holistic development and academic outcomes (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2013; Haywood & Sewell, 2016; Sedlacek, 1987).

Retention of African American Students

African American college students encounter disproportionate challenges within post-secondary environments due to systemic racial barriers which are identifiably laden within all sectors of existence across the United States, particularly in P-12 educational systems of learning, as well as within various realms of academic preparation and advancement (Carter, 2005; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Kozol, 1991). In addition to an array of pre-college scholastic disparities, Black students who enter predominantly White institutions are likely to experience environments which do not effectively address and dismantle the race-related inequities at work within society at large, as well as those which function openly and covertly throughout the grounds, within offices and classrooms of their college campuses (Bourke & Bray, 2019; Hurtado, 1992; Rankin & Reason, 2005;). Therefore, the recurrence of emotionally injurious experiences of African American students has an impact on their sense of belonging and levels of motivation which fundamentally effect and also inform the decisions of these collegians' persistence or departure (Gloria et al., 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; McClain & Perry, 2017; Seidman, 2007). It is imperative that leaders at every institution of higher learning take greater heed to the deep-rooted forces which are still at work negatively influencing the educational realities and rates of retention for underrepresented students of color (Braxton et al., 2004; Fischer, 2007).

Despite increasing levels of college admission and enrollment for underserved student populations, as well as implementation of progressive support programs and

initiation of academic intervention strategies, attrition levels for Black students have not significantly decreased and have also historically remained high in comparison with other student groups (Grier-Reed et al., 2008; McClain & Perry, 2017; Tierney, 2000). This ongoing paradox of improved admissions coupled with declining or stagnant retention is an indicator that conventional approaches are insufficient, and enhanced assessment strategies are needed to transform campus racial climates, as well as close continuous gaps in academic success and degree completion (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hirschy, 2016; Hurtado et al., 1999; Milem et al, 2004; Tinto, 1993). Degree completion data indicate that White college students graduate at a rate of 60% in comparison to African American students' rate of 40% over six years with this disparity also diminishing lifetime income levels, increasing college debt, and lessening career opportunities within the global job market (Smith & Wolf-Wendel, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008; Perna, 2002). These statistics speak to a pronounced and palpable need for contemporary and emergent research studies to be conducted on institutional strategies to better retain Black collegians, given that introductory studies and classical retention literature are grounded within and primarily centered around the college experiences of White students (Bourke & Bray, 2019; Myers, 2003; Perna, 2002; Rendon et al., 2000).

Retention of African American Men

The academic concept of retention involves the outcome of maintaining or keeping college students enrolled using institutional methods to foster positive mindsets within collegians, while also providing an equally welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, regardless of race or ethnic background (Brooks et al., 2012; Tinto, 1999). Unfortunately, the yearly retention of African American men within historically

White post-secondary institutions has continued to lag behind other student segments (Lang, 1992; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). One cause in particular for this high rate of attrition has to do with adverse lived experiences and mistreatment stemming from Black misandry, a form of ongoing racial hostility willfully directed towards Black men and driven by society's historical disdain of African American men (Pruitt, 2013; Smith et al., 2007). Unfortunately, this racially-infused animus finds its way into corridors of higher education and the myriad effects may cause Black men to feel a sense of isolation and oppressed which negatively impacts their immediate and long-term academic performance (Roach, 2001; Snipe, 2007).

Upon enrolling African American men, institutional retention efforts must be immediate and comprehensive, especially considering that this student population is only half in number of the actual collegians who are Black women that attend and successfully complete their college aspirations (Astin, 1982; Brooks et al., 2012; Parker & Scott, 1985; Wilson, 1995). Black men who pursue college also lag in achievement outcomes when compared against various other student segments despite socioeconomic standing or class status, with no substantial change being reflected across performance metrics or academic indicators (Cuyjet, 1997; Noguera, 2003). The ongoing social, cultural and educational barriers which are apparent inhibitors to the retention and post-secondary success of African American men must be prioritized, investigated, addressed, and resolved once and for all (Ellis, 2004; Majors & Billson, 1992).

Degree Completion of African American Men

For many decades there has been increasing dialogue, research, and supportive efforts among institutions of higher learning to formulate and implement programmatic

interventions which attempt to address lingering disparities in graduation rates of Black men in comparison to other student populations (Grant, 2019; Polite & Davis, 1999). Black men who began pursuit of a bachelor's degree in 2014 achieved a graduation rate of a mere 38.6 percent by 2020, whereas in contrast during this six-year period, collegiate men of Asian descent achieved a 77 percent rate, and European American men realized a 64 percent degree completion rate, and Latino men accomplished a 54 percent rate of graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Such a pronounced difference in graduation outcomes, undoubtedly indicate that African American collegiate men are being confronted with a range of challenges which are not affecting or being experienced by other similarly situated college student populations (Grant, 2019; Harper, 2009).

The evolution of access to quality education in general for Black men has been a complicated yet discernable phenomenon, with barriers to learning and literacy occurring during and across periods of slavery, racial segregation, disparate funding of P-20 schools, along with lingering manifestations and encounters of institutional racism, as well as microaggressions within HWI's (Allen et al., 2013; Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Dixson et al., 2016; Grant, 2019; Levine & Levine, 2014; Preston-Cunningham et al., 2016). A systemically toxic climate of this nature is likely to breed disheartening experiences which may not only interfere with learning processes but can re-traumatize African American men regarding past discriminatory experiences which have occurred off-campus and outside of the educational context (Nelson et al, 2020; Pruitt, 2013). These impressionable encounters which are often unreported give rise to institutional distrust and emotional detachment within a student population who may already question whether they belong, while navigating adverse impacts upon their academic achievement

due to racial stress (Brooms, 2019; Cuyjet, 2006; Rhoden, 2017; Robertson & Mason, 2008).

In order to effectively assist Black men with successfully completing their baccalaureate aspirations, leaders within post-secondary institutions must be fully committed to ensuring their classrooms and campus environments are consistently supportive and impartial with these values being embraced, affirmed and wholly demonstrated among administrators, faculty, staff, and students, as well as by campus security and within their policing practices (Dixson et al., 2016; Harper, 2015; Kelly & Dixon, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2015). A concerted approach of this nature reflects the essentials of devoted and responsible stewardship to not only the academic success of African American men, but also to the overall equitable functioning of each unit within every historically White institution of higher learning (Anumba, 2015; Brooks et al., 2012; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Robertson & Mason, 2008).

Summary

This literature review examined various themes involving retention and degree completion of undersupported college students, giving particular attention to the lived experiences of first-generation African American men within historically White post-secondary institutions. The range of topical content included research data describing experiential perspectives of Black collegians in general and transitioned to include findings from empirical studies and recent literature involving first-generation college students, emphasizing retention and degree completion of African American men. Aspects of social capital theory were defined functionally and operationally with

historical origins of the concept being elaborated upon, given its centrality to the designated subject matter and overarching focus of this qualitative research study.

Specific theoretical constructs were utilized providing scope and context to systemic accounts of racialized experiences and mistreatment exacted upon Black collegiate men due to both race and gender, which is driven by the momentum and legacy of broader societal contempt. Each interpretive framework which was illuminated within the review reflected its own singular purpose and description, with a collective alignment to substantiate and amplify the voices of those who are routinely unheard. The various interpretive lenses embedded within the literature review provide suitable contexts for the research study's design and consist of ontology, phenomenology, critical theory and critical race theory.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the influence of social capital on degree completion of first-generation African American men. An in-depth, open-ended interview protocol sought to capture the participants' perspectives on how their access to networks, benefits and resources contributed to their academic success. This chapter focused on the research methodology, participants' selection process, setting context, and interview procedures. Explanations were also provided on the data collection techniques, role of the researcher and the data analysis plan. In addition, a discussion was formulated on ethical considerations, human subjects research, trustworthiness and credibility. Lastly, the chapter concluded by elaborating on confirmability, dependability and addressing researcher bias.

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

This study utilized a qualitative research method with a focus on the perspectives of participants regarding social capital and its influence on degree completion of first-generation African American men at the University of Louisville. The inquisitive and exploratory nature of a qualitative approach revealed the interviewees' thoughts and views, as well as addressed the specific research questions of this research study. Additionally, a qualitative research approach interrogated perspectives of a few individuals to highlight the shared experiences which involve many (Creswell, 2003).

Hence, this study's in-depth exploration unveiled the specific meanings which were derived from or constructed across the duration of the interviewees' undergraduate collegiate encounters (Merriam, 1998). The investigation and analysis of these multiple perspectives provided behavioral or interpretive patterns which reflected a notable phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Research Questions

RQ1: What aspects of social capital do African American men ascribe to their college degree completion at the University of Louisville?

RQ2: What are the experiences and perspectives on social capital among first-generation African American men who are graduates from the University of Louisville?

RQ3: In what way/s did the participant's racial identity/ies affect his undergraduate college experience/s at the University of Louisville?

Research Approach

A phenomenological research approach was utilized to identify, understand and project certain lived experiences of the study participants (Creswell, 2014; van Manan, 1990). My aim as the researcher involved an exploration of meaningful and unique perspectives of each individual, as well as interpretations of any shared group phenomena (Creswell, 2007; Shaw, 2001). The various words spoken by the interviewees formed the crux of the research study, and this specific qualitative approach was useful towards countering any biases or preconceived ideas of mine as the researcher (Morrissette, 1999).

The data collection process required me to be the primary instrument which is a core component of qualitative methodology (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, semi-

structured, yet in-depth interviews were conducted to ascertain how the participants make

meaning of their world and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2005;

Muses, 2007). The data extracted from the interviews were transcribed and enabled me to

identify categories, themes, and codes which revealed an array of the interviewees'

perspectives (Glesne, 2016). Thick and rich descriptions highlighted previously

undiscovered phenomena and lived experiences which are characteristic of qualitative

research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Several other qualitative approaches such as ethnographic, case study, grounded

theory and narrative were considered, but were not selected. I did not choose an

ethnographic approach because it requires observing a group over a long time period

(Creswell, 2007). A case study research approach was not utilized because it involves

developing an observational, in-depth understanding of a single case (Creswell, 2013).

The grounded theory approach requires the creation of a new theory, which is not the

goal or purpose of this research study (Creswell, 2013). I did not select a narrative

approach as it would not have sufficiently answered this study's research questions and a

narrative method often involves data collection from only one participant (Patton,

2002).

Research Setting: The University of Louisville

The research site regarding this study was the University of Louisville, a

predominantly White public university awarding undergraduate, graduate and

professional degrees. This research-intensive institution is state supported and located in

Kentucky's largest urban area with an average ACT (American College Testing) score of

25. The fall 2020 enrollment was 23,246 students which included 2,787 (12%) African

American students with 1,055 (4%) being African American men (University of
Louisville, 2021).

Research Participants

This research study involved a robust exploration and rigorous analysis of nine
participants' lived experiences using purposeful, information-rich sampling (Patton,
2002). Purposeful sampling was employed to identify and invite participants who could
best answer the research questions (Creswell, 2002). Additionally, snowball sampling
procedures involve receiving recommendations from initial participants to identify
additional prospective individuals who fit the characteristics for this study; however, it
was not necessary (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This study's research participants
met specific criteria and standards, wherein the sample consisted of African American
men who are first-generation college graduates and earned bachelor's degrees across
various academic disciplines at the University of Louisville.

Interviews Research Procedure

Participants for the study were identified, invited and recruited by me with a
direct request for contact information from the University of Louisville's Office of
Institutional Research and Planning (IRP). Upon approval, the IRP Office provided the
names, school emails and personal email addresses of all graduates who were first-
generation African American men that completed bachelor's within the last three years.
Upon receipt of their contact information, an email was sent with an introduction from
me, along with an overview of the study, as well as specifics on timeframes and potential
dates for online interviews. This communication included a specified deadline for
prospects to respond (via email) expressing their interest and willingness to serve as a

participant within this research study. The first nine individuals with a firm interest

towards participating were contacted via telephone by me to briefly discuss the

qualitative study and formally schedule online interviews. One-on-one interviews were

then set once prospects understood the study's intent with completion of required

preliminary human subjects protocols. This process specifically involved explaining

aspects of confidentiality, ethical procedures, and anonymity with the research

participants having read and understood the consent preamble document which described

the purpose, risks and benefits of this dissertation study.

The data collection resources for this study included 15 open-ended questions,

along with a brief demographic survey containing 11 questions presented directly by the

researcher using an online communications platform (Roberts, 2010). Research

participants were asked relevant follow-up questions to encourage storytelling,

particularly if additional information or response clarifications were needed. Each

observational interview occurred to elicit responses which addressed the study's research

questions, and ensured rigorous standards of qualitative research were met (Janesick,

2007; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Several additional documents included an

interview schedule, observation notes, and a memo journal (Glesne, 2016). A copy of the

interview questions and demographic survey is provided in the appendix section of this

study (Roberts, 2010). After thoroughly reviewing the literature on elements involving

robust qualitative studies, the above-mentioned interview protocol was determined to be

most pertinent to this phenomenological research study (Saldana, 2013).

Data Collection

The data collected for this study involved one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted during the 2023-2024 academic year at the University of Louisville. The individual interviews lasted between sixty and one-hundred twenty minutes and began with a brief introduction and overview to describe the study, followed by explanations regarding the consent preamble which was emailed, and then proceeded with completion of the interviews. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed with every participant having an opportunity to read their individual interview transcript and responding with clarifications necessary for corrections (Merriam, 1998). This member checking technique was intended to legitimize the researcher's analytical interpretations of the data with opportunities to insert omissions, as well as enhance the accuracy of any thematic conclusions (Glesne, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Role of the Researcher

My experiential perspective as a man who is a first-generation, African American college graduate provided the impetus for this academic topic and has duly informed the scope of this phenomenological research study. It was my aim to uncover and amplify any potential influences of social capital on degree completion of first-generation African American men who have graduated from the University of Louisville. While conducting this study, I was not an employee of the University of Louisville, and had no professional affiliations between myself, the post-secondary institution, or the graduates included within the sample.

My professional connection to this genre of research stems from having served as a higher education administrator in the roles of associate dean of outreach and

recruitment at a Hispanic serving institution, national college admissions consultant, as well as director, lead academic coach, and instructor for three different federal TRiO programs at a historically Black college or university, and at two historically White institutions. I was also fortunate to have served as a retention graduate assistant and program coordinator for inaugural Black male initiatives at two historically White institutions, and successfully completed graduate student affairs internships at the University of Louisville's schools of engineering, law, and medicine respectively. Encounters from my various capacities ignited an ambition and curiosity to investigate and illuminate potential ways to better support the holistic success of underserved college students.

Interview Protocol

Individual interviews of nine study participants were conducted using a semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interview protocol (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 1990). The 15-interview questions addressed elements of the three research questions on social capital theory and lived experiences of African American men who are first-generation graduates from the University of Louisville. One-on-one interviews began with building rapport using informal dialogue about how participants were doing and evolved by acquiring background details on participants' names, academic majors, prior involvement within student organizations, and other relevant demographic insights (Glesne, 2006). During these information-rich conversations when a participant provided a response, or answers which addressed multiple interview questions, the conversation continued without interruption (Merriam, 2009).

The interviews were conducted via desktop computers, personal laptops, or other digital devices using Zoom live-streaming video conferencing software at a pre-determined time, convenient to all participants during the day or evening (Roberts, 2010). The individual one-on-one interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder while taking observation notes, and devising a memo journal (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also performed a verbatim transcription of the interview dialogue to acquire sufficient data and achieve the outcome of saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Data Analysis Plan

After all observations and interviews with the study participants were completed, along with data collection, I systematically organized all information derived from the biographical sketches, interview transcripts, observation notes, journal memos, and audio recordings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The preliminary steps prior to performing an objective analysis included structuring and ordering the data to address the research questions, and accurately interpreting the interviewees' perspectives (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Elements of this phenomenological study analyses involved diligently reading and re-reading all the collected data (Maxwell, 2005). This immersion into details of the data enabled me to amplify what was heard, read, and seen among the participants to uncover relevant meaning, allowing the data to speak for itself (Glesne, 2006; Luttrell, 2000; Patton, 1990).

To develop a thematic framework, I utilized a formal coding process to identify categorical similarities and differences found within the data (Glesne, 2016; Patton, 1990). These groupings consisted of various topical patterns, relational concepts, ideas and exact keywords of the interviewees, classified as in vivo codes (Creswell, 2013;

Lewins et al., 2005). As the researcher of this qualitative study, I manually transcribed all audible data, and individually performed the coding process. This detailed phenomenological analysis yielded rich and thick descriptions to accurately depict the lived experiences of the research participants (Glesne, 2006). In addition, my analytical approach included the following abbreviated methods:

1. Step One: Described participants' personal experiences with the phenomenon under study.

2. Step Two: Developed a list of significant statements.

3. Step Three: Arranged significant statements and grouped them into larger units of information called themes.

4. Step Four: Wrote a description of "what" the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon.

5. Step Five: Formulated a depiction of "how" the experience happened.

6. Step Six: Wrote a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013, p. 193; Moustakas, 1994).

Lastly, the final results of the data analyses are reported in chapter four.

Ethical Considerations

Upon commencing this research study, I consistently adhered to mandated ethical procedures which are standard protocols regarding human subjects research, including informed consent with use of a consent preamble. All data collected from the research participants were stored in a password protected database. Pseudonyms or coded names were used for anonymity to protect the identities of the study participants and reasonable

efforts toward confidentiality were applied by not disclosing personally identifiable information. Prior to the interviews, all participants were informed on the purpose of the study, knowing that their participation was voluntary and withdrawal from the study could occur at any time according to their discretion.

Institutional Review Board

Given my role as an investigator for this dissertation study, in March 2021, a series of certified training modules on human subjects research were completed through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. Prior to implementing the research study, a detailed research proposal was submitted to the University of Louisville's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for a thorough review and formal approval (Glesne, 2006). This standardized review process ensured the study's framework complied with established protocols and was designed with minimal risks to prospective participants. The IRB's approval letter is included within the appendix section of this research study.

Trustworthiness

To ensure all elements of this study were rigorous and of the highest research quality - context-rich, thick and meaningful descriptions were incorporated within the analysis of the observations and participant interviews (Glesne, 2016). Any biases of mine were subjectively clarified, along with compiling a confidential audit trail to serve as a record on the integrity of the research process (Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, the procedure of triangulation occurred with a thorough review and feedback from my dissertation committee, and more specifically from my designated methodology expert (Creswell, 2013).

Credibility

The sharing of interview transcripts with research participants for the purpose of member checking was an effective method used to minimize instances of bias when the research data were analyzed (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The member checking technique was also actively used for potential corrections to ensure the written analyses adequately reflected various participants' experiences and perspectives. There were two participant requests to change the names of certain programs to further enhance anonymity, and two additional participants expressed inquiries to confirm that specific name changes had occurred in order to establish anonymity. Peer debriefing was also employed as a method where two of my peers with no personal interest in this research project - intently reviewed my transcripts, interview notes and findings. The feedback received during these processes enabled me to uncover and correct any potential errors in the data and to address any of my own unapparent biases (Creswell, 2007).

Transferability

In a qualitative research study, transferability involves providing detailed descriptions enabling the reader to ensure the research techniques or methods are procedurally sound and concisely aligned with established theoretical practices (Glaser, 2005; Miles et al., 2014). In this study, individuals with certain commonalities were intently selected to thoroughly address the designated research questions, which also contributed to considerably rich and thick descriptions in the analysis of the study's findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Each of the participants' shared characteristics involved men who are African American, along with being first-generation college graduates from the University of Louisville. The sum of this study's concise processes

and meticulous efforts provided a means for readers to reasonably assess and determine

trustworthiness of the data and its findings (Miles et al., 2014).

Confirmability

The investigative procedures and methods for this study are described in detail

and any potential changes to its original scope were fully divulged and documented. Such

deliberate aims within the research sequence and modes of analysis enabled processes

undertaken during the study to be confirmed or audited by others, including the

dissertation advisor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure transparency within this study,

my role as a researcher having a similar background to participants in the study was

described earlier in this chapter. Such efforts to disclose my positionality is a candid

acknowledgment to explicitly inform readers on how my perceptual lens, beliefs, or

personal values affected analysis of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The study's

interview questions were intently crafted to avoid leading participants to predetermined

answers, and follow-up questions were also posed, as necessary to ensure the unveiling of

their specific lived experiences. The data's findings were checked and rechecked, and a

reflective journal was utilized while implementing the interview protocol, data collection,

and analyses of the data (Given, 2008).

Dependability

To further ensure methods and research findings of this study were transparent, a

detailed description of practices across each phase of the study was compiled to reflect

elements of rigor and consistency (Miles et al., 2014). A research journal was also

intently utilized for protocol transparency in conceptualizing the study, collecting

participants' data, analyzing findings, and reporting the results (Given, 2008; Merriam,

1998). The journal included my detailed reflections to create and maintain an audit trail for review by an independent auditor who was Dr. Kia Marie Pruitt (Miles et al., 2014). She is a doctoral graduate from the University of Louisville's College of Education and Human Development. Dr. Pruitt's research expertise similarly involves college retention and degree completion of African American men. The auditor's role was to confirm the qualitative research process was not constricted by the investigator's preconceptions and that the respondents' data was accurately reflected according to phenomenological research methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A description of Dr. Pruitt's review with her feedback is provided in chapter four of this dissertation. Such stringent accountability steps within the research process ensured each of the study's protocols were rigorous and theoretically sound (Luttrell, 2010).

Addressing Researcher Bias

Considerable efforts were employed to ensure the study's data analysis is trustable and accurately reflected, as well as amplified the research participants' perspectives, views, and lived experiences (Maxwell, 2009). Systematic steps were taken to distance myself from the data, mute my subjectivity and personal feelings, as well as clarify any explicit or unapparent biases (Glesne, 2006). I utilized the process of bracketing which involved maintaining a reflective, written journal during and after interviewing the participants (Given, 2008; Vagle, 2014). The entries within the journal reflected consistent and transparent disclosure of my beliefs, values, and preconceptions (Glesne, 2006). This reflexive bracketing provided a self-awareness towards minimizing the occurrence of analytical bias when I interpreted the data (Maxwell, 2005).

Prior to the conclusion of the study, member checking was also conducted to verify that all interpretations derived from the data appropriately reflected the lived experiences and perspectives from the array of research participants (Glesne, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). Member checking entailed providing a full draft of the written codes and themes to the interviewees, wherein they provided feedback and confirmed the findings were accurate and credible (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Saldana, 2013). Upon it having been necessary to revise or modify the data analyses, all requested edits were made to maximize accuracy of the rich and thick descriptions (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2006, Merriam, 1998).

Peer review and debriefing processes were implemented to identify and further isolate any of my subtle biases (Creswell, 2007). This encompassed a review and feedback from an external colleague, Dr. Derrick R. Brooms who is a professor and executive director of the Black Men's Research Institute at Morehouse College. He has acquired expertise in phenomenological research and he critiqued my research design and data analyses. Dr. Brooms also reviewed this study's themes and codes, as well as provided any necessary feedback determined to further enhance the study's trustworthiness and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

Summary

This chapter offered various descriptive components of a qualitative methodology and certain justifications for selecting a phenomenological study. I chose this specific design to permit the lived experiences of the participants to be unveiled and appropriately amplified. Chapter three also clarified the solidity of data collection procedures, research setting elements and how the prospective study participants were selected. The

elaborations which I provided on structural components and methods of this qualitative

approach will enable the reader to usefully interpret the data analyses, its findings, as well

as wholly comprehend the recommendations and implications provided in chapters four

and five.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

  This chapter discloses research findings and analyses from my phenomenological study purposed to examine the influence of social capital on baccalaureate degree completion of first-generation African American men who graduated from the University of Louisville over the past three years. In addition to the six prevailing and salient themes, descriptive characteristics of the nine study participants will be provided stemming from replies to an 11-item demographic survey. Also included in this chapter are descriptions of the peer review and member checking processes, along with elaborations resulting from the interviewees' responses to 15 open-ended interview questions, and relevant sub-questions designed to address this qualitative study's three overarching research questions which are:

RQ1: What aspects of social capital do African American men ascribe to their college

   degree completion at the University of Louisville?

RQ2: What are the experiences and perspectives on social capital among first-generation

   African American men who are graduates from the University of Louisville?

RQ3: In what way/s did the participant's racial identity/ies affect his undergraduate

   college experience/s at the University of Louisville?

A critical theory lens was utilized in the design and analyses of this dissertation to investigate the research questions and induce possibilities for self-authorship and institutional change (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016; Horkheimer, 1972/1992). Furthermore, an ontological philosophical assumption provided the context for interrogating this study's findings and exploring attributes of participants' beliefs derived from their shared social realities (Ahmed, 2008; Hill et al., 1997). Additionally, critical race theory was used as the interpretive scope to decipher interviewees' lived experiences around the manufactured construct of race, as well as to unveil the function and affects of racism occurring throughout the post-secondary environment (Crenshaw, 1989; Cuyjet, 1997; Dixson & Rousseau, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Study Interviewees

The following descriptive profiles will familiarize readers with nine individuals who met the sample criteria and participated in this research study upon receiving an IRB-approved email invitation and agreeing to the terms detailed within the consent preamble document. Each participant's interview was conducted using the Zoom internet-based software platform with one-on-one informal discussions lasting for about 30 minutes to one hour and scheduled at a time according to the participants' availability. The live-streaming conversational dialogue was captured using a digital audio recorder with the confidential sessions occurring across a two-week time span. Distinct pseudonyms are used as a reasonable effort to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Ahkeem

Ahkeem is a 22 year-old African American who graduated in four years with a bachelor's degree in biology. He was involved in several student organizations including

an academic scholarship program, a student leadership organization, and a medical school preparation program. While matriculating, Ahkeem worked a full-time job on campus, and completed two paid summer research internships during the second and third years of his undergraduate studies.

Andre

Andre is a 23 year-old African American who transferred from another post-secondary institution and graduated in three years with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. He was a member of an academic coaching program for his major and was briefly active with the Black Male Initiative. Andre consistently held on-campus and off-campus jobs while completing his degree to cover various costs related to his undergraduate education.

Antwon

Antwon is a 23 year-old African American who majored in business marketing and successfully completed his bachelor's degree in four years despite stopping out from his collegiate studies on three occasions. He was an engaged member of multiple student organizations including the Black Male Initiative, Brothers United, the Black Student Union, as well as the Minority Achievement Program. During his undergraduate studies, Antwon served as a major sports brand Ambassador, and out of financial necessity held part-time and work study positions.

Donte

Donte is a 25 year-old African American who earned a bachelor's degree in public health in three years after transferring from a community college. He could not participate in any student organizations due to the need of consistently maintaining

employment to assist with funding his college education. Prior to beginning his post-secondary studies, Donte migrated to America as a refugee from the continent of Africa with pivotal support from the Kentucky Refugee Ministries organization where he also completed an undergraduate internship.

Jamal

Jamal is a 31 year-old African American who completed a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership and learning as a non-traditional student who temporarily stopped out from his collegiate studies on two occasions. Across the span of his undergraduate career, Jamal was involved in the Scholarly Ones student organization, became a member of Omega Psi Phi fraternity, and the National Association of Black Journalists. He was both a mentee, and peer mentor within the Caring of New students Experiencing College Transitions (CONECT) organization, and upon re-enrolling at UofL Jamal steadily worked full-time to provide for himself, his wife, and their child.

Johnathan

Johnathan is a 23 year-old African American who earned a bachelor's degree in biology after four years of study and was active within the Society of Porter Scholars, while also playing two intramural sports consisting of three years on the basketball team, and a single year on the football squad. Additionally, while earning his degree Johnathan regularly worked part-time jobs to help pay his college tuition and fulfill other financial responsibilities.

Keon

Keon is a 32 year-old non-traditional student who attained a bachelor's degree in Pan African Studies after transferring from a local community college. Throughout the

duration of his undergraduate studies, Keon worked full-time to earn compensation for basic living expenses and to pay tuition fees and various costs. Due to considerable time commitments required by his employer, it was not possible to participate in student organizations or extracurricular activities.

Marcus

Marcus is a 32 year-old African American who identifies as multi-racial. He graduated after two years of study, earning a bachelor's degree in nursing. Marcus transferred from an out of state post-secondary institution, and as a non-traditional student with financial obligations, it was necessary to work full-time across the entire span of his UofL academic degree program which prevented any on-campus involvement.

Reginald

Reginald is a 36 year-old African American, non-traditional student who completed a bachelor's degree in communications. He initially began his undergraduate studies at a different university and transferred to the University of Louisville. Upon transferring he also paused the pursuit of his degree for several years. Upon returning to UofL, Reginald could not fulfill any extracurricular interests, as he maintained off-campus employment during his studies to cover college costs and basic living expenses.

Theme 1: Sense of Belonging

To maximize levels of academic success, it is essential that every college student feels seen and authentically valued as an esteemed member of their post-secondary institution (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Colemen, 1990; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Putnam, 2000). Each of the nine first-generation African American men

who were participants in this research study shared narratives and perspectives, recounting an awareness of belonging while attending the University of Louisville. Ahkeem described feeling a memorable sense of connectedness at UofL during verbal interactions amongst a group of college students who shared his ethnic identity.

> I want to say just being in my scholarship program, or I guess the first time I met all of the student scholars. Because UofL is still a predominantly White institution, so those spaces where you have all Black people was very re-affirming. And despite it being a PWI (predominantly White institution) , there are still spaces for Black students, so yeah it was the diversity, and just being with marginalized people in general. (Ahkeem)

Andre described a time of being acknowledged and affirmed when he was surprisingly bestowed with an award for the exemplary service he demonstrated as a resident assistant.

> A time when I felt I most belonged would probably be when I received the resident assistant of the year award, which I'm proud of and still have in my office. It was my first year as a resident assistant (RA) It was during COVID, it was just a lot. It was overwhelming and I felt like I wasn't doing a good job. I was very creative with the programming and things like that, but I was underestimating my impact that I had on individuals, and to my surprise I was acknowledged and received the RA of the year award at the student affairs awards ceremony. I don't know the actual name, but at the end of every school year, they have a ceremony in the ballroom. I was invited too because I received the award.

Ironically enough, the dean of students was the one that handed me the award, someone who I kind of went back and forth with. And a lot of the reason that I received that award was for the advocacy I did for the residence hall at the time that was being built on campus. It was supposed to be gender inclusive, but it was no longer going to be gender inclusive, so I was fighting for it to remain gender inclusive. And I fought with the director of housing and with the dean of students. So that was interesting that he was the one to hand me that award. And so many people nominated me for receiving that award and I just felt like I really made an impact and just felt like okay, I did good. (Andre)

Antwon recalled feeling aspects of familial kinship resulting from a well-attended on-campus event which he successfully coordinated while also working in unison with several student organizations.

It would be my senior year when I was a retail brand ambassador, and we had an event at the Cultural Center. We brought in probably over 500+ UofL students. It was more just a final celebration event; it was before spring break. So it was like our big event, right before we left school. I would say connectivity is one of the most valuable things. It really taught me to see people for more than what I assessed them as before, and it was just that family can be found anywhere. I think beforehand, I was only able to take my family into consideration as in like, these are the only people that really really care about me. But college showed me that there can be people who don't even really know you, you know more than 24 hours who genuinely have that same type of care. Now everyone's not like that,

but I did meet, and I'm thankful cause' I've met a lot of people like that in

college. (Antwon)

Donte shared that a personal sense of belonging transpired (for him) upon being

notified of his acceptance into UofL, and with the various elements of support he

received from a number of professors.

I will say when I was thinking about going to medical school, and then I heard

there was financial aid available for students at UofL, so I was saying to myself,

this is the place where I'm supposed to be. This is a good university where I can

try to accomplish a dream that I want to come true. It felt great the day I received

the email stating I was admitted. It included instructions on getting my classes, a

schedule, and stating I would begin my courses in the next semester. It was

something that was pretty much fantastic to me. When I was admitted to

Louisville, I said, "Oh my God, I belong in Louisville!" Taking my classes, I

really appreciated how some of the professors were willing to work with me.

They said, "Let me know, I'll work with you, if you're going to need some

additional time; I will provide that." That was so fantastic. (Donte)

Jamal successfully graduated as a non-traditional student after pausing the pursuit

of his undergraduate studies on two separate occasions. He expressed that his ultimate

perception of connectedness to UofL did not materialize until he had actually completed

his bachelor's degree.

It's funny, but it was after I graduated, cause' now I finally closed a chapter.

Because I completed this task that's taken me so long, so now I feel when it

comes to people saying certain stuff about the university or maybe attending

events, and just things in general, I'd be like, yeah I'm an alumni now, so it's really a part of my identity. For instance, when we won the national championship. I wasn't in school during that time, and it might be stupid, but it felt different because I wasn't in school versus some people that were in school when we won. It felt like I wasn't a part of the culture of everything. I can't be like, yeah I was down there on the corner of Cardinal Boulevard or anything celebrating. I was there, but it was like I wasn't a student there; I was there, but I'm not feeling it the way y'all are feeling it. Now that it's engrained into my history book, their history book of graduates, I feel like I belong. (Jamal)

Johnathan disclosed that he experienced aspects of relational belongingness while building friendships at UofL's recreation center, and during some of his first-year courses where open dialogue was intently encouraged by the professors.

Me personally, I didn't feel like I belonged at Louisville until I kind of like met one of my best friends at Louisville freshman year at the SRC (student recreation center). So maybe I'll say, staying active at the gym and doing things that you like allowed me to meet people that I really see as lifelong friends. Also I like my gen-ed classes where they would let people of different majors mingle and talk in one class. Because it opened perspectives and I like how the teachers would sort of encourage the classes to talk. Because of course when you got a normal major class, everyone's in there, they're all learning the same thing. And for most people, it's their first time really learning that major, so you're just basically taking notes the whole time, versus when we have a gen-ed class that's based on

personal experiences in the world. It's kind of cool to see everyone's experiences, and just have class where everyone can be a little more open. (Johnathan)

Keon's recollection of being meaningfully connected stemmed from a classmate's courageous advocacy which occurred when pamphlets of intolerance were unexpectedly dropped off in one of his classes.

I was in one of my professor's intro to LGBTQ studies course when we had anti-queer pamphlets with controversial rhetoric delivered to our class. That was delivered on six desks, and mine was one of them, because I was one of the first ones in there. And my classmate behind me who was a straight woman from Africa, she just went off on the guy. And that ended up becoming a bit of a story, you know it was on campus, it was in the news and everything. Just the solidarity that I had felt from the students and from campus. You know I technically graduated high school back in 2009, 2010 - one of those years. So I had not experienced that pro-LGBTQ stuff for ten years, as far as like a school setting goes. And then seeing, and actually feeling that solidarity, which was like oh wow, it's not just talk. (Keon)

Marcus, who was an out-of-state transfer student conveyed that a genuine connection to the institution was distinctly felt at the very beginning of his first course upon enrolling at UofL.

Long story short, when we started our courses, we would always introduce ourselves at the beginning of the year. You look at some of the people that are in these courses with you. And the people that are in these courses are regular people just like me; regular folks just like me, who are all nurses, they are all working.

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Some of them may be taking the degree because they have to, some of them want to take it so they can move into management. Everybody's trying to improve a little bit. Everybody has lives with challenges.

For me, as soon as I took my first class and got to see that my cohort looked like me; they looked like regular folks. I didn't feel like they were when I was at the University of Missouri. I know at points [in Missouri] it felt like a lot of the nursing students I went to class with, they were all like these sorority girls that were pretty homogenous, all White, blond sorority girls, and that's fine. But what I appreciated about my junior college was that it was a cohort of regular people that all had lives and things going on. And not everybody was going to school on daddy's money. And I remember feeling more comfortable in that small community college than I felt at big University of Missouri.

And the same is true of UofL. UofL is a major university that has good money and they do well, but at the same time, it's a school that's accessible to everyday people. So [I felt like I most belonged at UofL] when I started my first class and we introduced ourselves is when. (Marcus)

Reginald, a non-traditional returning student, revealed he experienced a magnitude of belonging due to his engaging and practical coursework, as well as by having individual dialogue with professors in the final semester of his matriculation.

I would have to say, even though it was online, it would have to have been my final semester. The last four courses, though they were extremely heavy, and I doubled up on classes. I actually got a lot out of the last four courses. Even with interacting with the professors one on one. Like one of my leadership courses

actually resonated with me, and actually trickled into my day job. And then my

humanities course was giving me a whole perspective on how to interact and deal

with people. Even in dealing with myself, so I feel like although they were

courses required for graduation, they're also good life resources, and good life

tools that I can utilize today. (Reginald)

Theme 2: Resourceful College Relationships

Pursuit of a college degree provides opportunities for constructive interactions to

occur resulting in potential development of lasting friendships and formation of mutual

acquaintances (Brown & Davis, 2001; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Lin, 2001; Portes,

1998). This study's research participants openly shared that their lived experiences

encompassed a series of positive interactions with classmates and peers across the

trajectory of their UofL undergraduate career. Ahkeem recounted how meeting other

scholarship recipients ultimately led to rapport-building opportunities and reciprocal

inspiration.

I think I bonded with a lot of the people who were in my scholarship program.

And I think that helped me to reinforce the discipline, time management skills,

and those skills that helped me be successful in college. The main two friends I

developed through the program ended up being my roommates for junior and

senior year. So they helped keep me grounded, and I admired so many things

about them. (Ahkeem)

Andre shared aspects of the close relationships he formed with classmates and

how their dialogue which began in the classroom led to various off-campus social

interactions and ongoing communications even to the present-day.

And then my peers, I was the only Black male really in the program it felt like, but my cohort of friends were students in the program. I was uplifted by them and supported by them as well. Ultimately just feeling supported overall was part of the reason why I was really doing well. I had a close friend; she was someone that I worked closely with. We always did homework together, always hung out outside of class together, and always did things together. It was me, her and four or five other people.

Like some days after we got done with our methods class, we would go get lunch together, we would hang out. Like even now, I still talk to her, maybe on a monthly basis, because she's also in grad school at UofL. She's always checking up on me and vice versa. She was very supportive and validated my feelings through those difficult times as well. I guess I should also mention that my close friend is a mixed girl and did share some identities with me. (Andre)

Antwon expressed how initially building academic connections with his peers also led to forming supportive social groups and student organizations which focused on addressing varied holistic needs of college students.

Plenty, study groups to begin with, like almost anyone I had class with and on a friend level, created a study group together, workout groups, and mental health associations. Just because going through college I'm supposed to have a personal experience, but it usually can be a lot. I think a spiritual outreach group, which was pretty organic. I didn't really create it, it kind of created itself. But I was more so a leader in that group. And that was amazing, just because it was an understanding of our God beyond the things that we've been told. That was fun,

and an eye opening experience. I'm glad I could talk to likeminded individuals, but that's more so the orgs I was involved in. I think it allowed me to capitalize on the opportunity I was given. Like being immersed in a culture that more so nurtured the good qualities, the good character traits, the positive things I wanted to build on. It was like an incubation chamber, those groups were. So it was a very nurturing environment, very lovely, very positive, and just progress oriented. So I think that really kept my head on a swivel, especially not having any family close to hold me accountable. Just having those people that I could go to, gave me a sense of family on campus. (Antwon)

Donte elaborated on the range of value that professors and peers within his courses provided and credited their motivational impact to his overall academic success. He also recounted meeting and learning about individuals from various cultures and how his mentality has changed due to those diverse encounters and transformative interactions.

All my teachers, most of them were like my friends who were available just to help, I really appreciated that. So if you wanted help, they were really there just to help you. And when I talked to them, they made themselves available to really help and I appreciated that. No matter what, they were availing their time to support students with their needs. I had classmates where we were working together. They were like friends, despite me not having much time when I started, I collaborated with them and we worked together. We would do our projects together, study to prepare for our exams or quizzes together and do our lab reports together. Those were very good connections that I really appreciated.

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I wanted to go to a lot of activities just to build connections, unfortunately I couldn't get to those because I was so busy working on my basic needs. I really appreciate the way I made connections with other classmates of mine. It made me think, you can do it no matter what. So I have a friend from France and he came here to study, also to be a doctor and attend medical school. We both were taking the French class so that we both could get A's. They told me to get a language class, so I was thinking to let a different language go. I chose French and it was pretty much beneficial. I really liked it and the diversity of people from different places; White, Black, Hispanic, everybody. I learned a lot from their cultures, their ways of doing stuff, the way that they think.

So I really was amazed just to have those kinds of life experiences. And then to think about my own perspectives and just to be mindful of the people around me; not to be biased. But to know that if someone is doing this; it's kind of affected by their culture. Just to know how I can work with him or her, and just to understand, and to know what's being felt, and how I am going to help. That was kind of something beneficial to help me get rid of those judgmental issues I had before, not to judge, but to look to understand. (Donte)

Jamal described a personal goal to evolve and grow by expanding his social network upon entering college, while maintaining friendships among UofL peers who also attended high school with him. He recalled the internal motivation which was nurtured through relational bonds while they each endeavored to earn their baccalaureate degrees.

Tons, going into my freshman year, I decided I was gonna' come out of my shell more, than I was in high school. And so, my freshman year I made it a goal to meet as many new people as I could to form these better friendships. And some of my friends I went to high school with ended up going to UofL too. What made it perfect was, we were out of that high school element, so we got to see how we actually interacted without being confined to somewhere for the amount of hours we were, so it made us grow closer. Most of my friends that I've had or that I made, it was different things. And you got to see their work ethic, their study ethic and things like that, it kinda' pushed you to be the best person you could be, because y'all are there ultimately to graduate. (Jamal)

Johnathan reflected on various mutual connections he developed while maintaining a sense of balance to de-stress from the multiple demands of being a college student. In addition to engaging in a variety of physical activities, he also recounted the mentoring received from his biological brother (a UofL graduate) and through an academic coaching program.

With peers and classmates, I established a decent size circle of friends and basically we came together, of course college is like a stressful time, so we came together and did different hobbies throughout campus to sort of take the stress levels down. This mainly consisted of African American students, but I had friends of all different types of backgrounds. And I think the reason why those relationships contributed to my success was because I was around likeminded people that liked to do productive hobbies in order to maybe get their minds off of class. But also, just make better people overall, and this consisted of things like

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staying active, lifting weights, intramural sports. Just guidance; even with things like Porter Scholars. As a freshman, I think he was a junior or senior mentor, as I forgot what the program was called but he was like a big brother sort of. I'm talking about the Porter Mentors, and I also had an older brother that previously went to UofL. (Johnathan)

Keon recalled the indelible support received from peers and a professor in one of his noteworthy courses which provided worthwhile knowledge. Keon also described interactions from students across various age ranges with whom he built a meaningful rapport.

Peers and classmates, meeting other classmates in really honestly Dr. Legend's classes. Being able to relate to them as far as lifestyles in quotation marks, and being able to expand my knowledge and understanding of different paths, and also from younger students. (Keon)

Marcus appreciated the linkages formed with several of his classmates early on, which continued across the span of their matriculation. The benefits included a collaborative learning effect where they cohesively worked on class projects, while also preparing for upcoming exams.

Study groups, I developed a few connections through study groups. I think one of the classes I was taking was a research class, and I developed two friends in that research class. We had to collectively work on some projects. I think the project we worked on was a paper about the Amish community, and social determinants of health, things like that. And what ended up happening is, because we were kind of a cohort going through these courses, we just stayed connected. So we initially

connected in research and then we talked in classes down the road; such as, "Hey, what did you think about this assignment? How are you approaching studying for this?" So I found it to be helpful. I didn't really engage some professors quite as much as I would have liked to, only because I was a little busy. (Marcus)

Reginald's on-campus interactions were minimal due to his degree program being completely online and the necessity to work full-time. The bulk of his relationships involved co-workers who were both aware, and understanding of Reginald's commitment towards his degree, as well as periodic outings with a few student acquaintances which formed shortly following Reginald's initial college enrollment.

Well since the courses were online and my day job was offsite, I really didn't have a lot of interaction on campus. But when it came to interacting with peers overnight at United Parcel Service (UPS), I did build some good working relationships. And some people I still kind of talk to, even though I'm not there anymore. But there's one student there that actually had a project that I helped her with. She had, almost kind of what you're working on with a study. You know I helped out with things like that. So I had some involvement here and there. There may have been some people from my past that I've gone to school with prior that I do link up with, when I do a couple of podcast segments, that are familiar with how I do things. So it's kind of like a mix of old and new when it comes to that. (Reginald)

Theme 3: Co-Navigators of Academic Success

The range of supports which college students may receive from various sources can assist with their acclimation into the post-secondary landscape, as well as aid them in

navigating and successfully resolving a multitude of academic and non-academic challenges (Barton & Coley, 2010; Clarke, 2020; Evans, 1998; Lin, 1999; Young et al., 2011). Ahkeem communicated that his principal investigator (PI), peers, clinical counselor, and professors were quite instrumental in providing guidance throughout his undergraduate experiences.

> In my senior year, I started going to counseling sessions and my counselor, he also played a big part, just getting more in tune with my emotions and learning how to manage stress better. I think my junior year was definitely like the most stressful year, just given the fact that like I said, I was studying for the MCAT, taking classes, and doing student leadership. So it was overwhelming at a point and then going to those sessions helped me learn how to just manage that stress better.
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> I would also say my PI that I did research with sophomore and junior years, just because he was a mentor to me, and I could reach out to him. He wrote one of my letters for medical school, so yeah he would be another good person as well. Then other teachers and professors as well, as I had various biology teachers that would check in, or ask about things: how classes were going? things like that. The most influential, I would say were my peers in general. My roommates or other people that have the same major or were also pre-med, probably contributed the most to that. (Ahkeem)

Andre mentioned the explicit resourcefulness derived from a number of individuals which included a program coordinator, an academic advisor, a particular

friend, as well as the formation of a friend group that had a favorable impact upon the attainment of his college degree.

I'll just reiterate that my academic program coordinator was very supportive. Then the financial support that I got from her; she was responsible for the scholarship distribution within the organization. So keeping me in the loop on those. Making sure that I didn't forget the deadline of applying on time. She was really supportive of me, as she also had textbooks that we could use, or get for free that were also within the department. That played a big role in my success as well.

When I came in as a transfer, I did have an academic advisor as well. He walked me through some of the courses I would have to take and helped me come up with alternatives for ones that would not fit my schedule. In terms of the most influential, I think honestly probably from my close friend, and the informal friend group that we had going. They were already established at UofL, they knew the resources, and specifically with my friend, due to us kind of sharing identities. She would refer me to other resources for Black students; people that I needed to get connected with in the College of Education and who I needed to talk to, if I had issues. Her experience contributed to my knowledge of UofL. (Andre)

Antwon identified the individuals who provided navigational influences during his collegiate journey as being his sister, a former girlfriend, and upper-class students who willingly mentored him, and generously directed him to on-campus locations and pertinent offices which enhanced his overall success.

I would have to say number one would be my sister, just because she was also a first- generation college student, and the first person from the lineage of my family to graduate college. So I was literally coming right behind her. I knew I had big shoes to fill. I knew I had to get the most out of my experience and do more than just graduate. So I think that really gave me the initiative to immerse myself in the college culture and really see the most that I can from that, understanding that this wasn't an opportunity that my family had seen before and I don't want to take it for granted.

I also would say my girlfriend at the time. We're no longer together but she was really accountable. We disciplined each other because we both kind of ran from homeward to school. That was the only person I knew from back home that was up there, and she just really kept me disciplined, or allowed me to keep myself disciplined by doing so for her. We graduated in the same semester. We didn't graduate together [as a couple], but we graduated.

With respect to the most influential individuals, I would say upper-class students who were my friends and kind of took me in as a mentee. They would tell me where I could find things easily, the best places to study, where I could take breaks at, where I could find resources, where to go for help when I needed certain things, just the ins and outs that a student would struggle with on a new campus. They were just making sure I was well equipped and I'm really thankful for that. (Antwon)

Donte eagerly described a broad circle of supportive individuals who not only provided authentic encouragement, but also tangible resources essential to the pursuit and

fulfillment of his academic goals. Donte's relational network included a Louisville couple and their son, a friend from Texas, his immediate family, a devoted professor and also his academic advisor.

Well we got here in 2016 and there was a devoted couple who was our supporters. They helped me a lot, and they were always planning to provide support. Their firstborn kid supplied me with my first laptop when he heard that I had a chance to go to college. This motivated me in a way that you can't even imagine - that somebody who never met me, he's never seen me before, but he just was going to send this laptop to me? It meant a lot; it really meant a lot. Besides that, they helped me a lot, like even just with transportation sometimes. I'm so thankful for them.

And my friend, a mixed guy from Texas - that was my first friend when I got here in 2016. So it was [all of] them just pushing me ahead, saying Donte you got this, you can do this. And then my family too. Also, one of my professors was telling me, "I want you to just go forth since you want to complete some goals in education; please don't stop, go, go, go, go." The most influential were Ms. Ecole (from the couple), and I'll say my professor as well, and then my friend from Texas. I would also say my advisor as she helped me a lot, for real. She connected me with another lady. So, if I ever needed a syllabus or books, she'd tell me to go to her. She said, "If she has it, she's gonna' provide it to you. Instead of buying, you're gonna' just take it, and use it. And when you finish you'll bring it back." She knew I was studying and that's why she was doing her best just to provide me with whatever necessities I needed. (Donte)

Jamal aptly mentions an array of individuals who were tenacious in offering guidance which contributed to the goal of his degree completion. Jamal acknowledges a CONECT advisor and a mentor from the same program - both having provided maternal influences. Jamal also credits a student organization advisor, and an inspiring peer who is referred to as his fraternity dean, along with his pastor - each of whom were instrumental towards his academic and holistic accomplishments.

> Yeah, I definitely got some people. In the CONECT mentoring program, it was one of the lead advisors. She kind of was like a mom in a way. Because she saw certain areas where I was struggling, not with the program itself, but like academics and stuff cause' with those programs you got to maintain a certain gpa and stuff like that. So they had access to all of that, and if ever she seen me dip in certain areas, she would reach out and say, hey I see you're struggling here, this is what we can do about it. She actually played a big role into me getting back in school this last time to finish up.

> Another influential person was the advisor over the Scholarly Ones program. Just the same way, he gave me like life advice, and on stuff that happened in school, but you can translate it to real world problems, things like that. He was that type of person for me. And maybe like people who were in the same boat as me, but I always viewed them like - I won't even say a big brother, because we were all the same age but like, you know it's certain people who have their stuff more together than you might.

> One of them is my fraternity dean, so he brought me into Omega Psi Phi. More than just that, he is an exemplary person, it's just everything about him.

And I was just talking to a friend about this, anything he said he was gonna' do, he's done it. He's taught me ways to really plan stuff out, and then make a goal for myself, and make a way to achieve the goal that I set for myself. And so when it comes to life and when it comes to finances, anything, if I ever have something I need to talk to him about, he's right there. He's shown me anything that I might need help with and guidance, and things like that.

And of course, outside of school, my pastor, he's always been there. It's something about him, he's different, he doesn't follow trends and things like that, that certain pastors might get sucked into, as far as like just how things might be out in the world and everything. He's just always confirming what the word says, so he kinda' has always gave me everything flat, like honest. He still to this day, you know I go to church and everything, so he's still doing that.

The most influential person would be my CONECT mentor, as she really guided me through that first year. She told me where things were as far as like campus resources, the best hangout spots to be at. She's a Black woman, and if there was any advice I could get from her, if I wanted to talk to some other woman on campus, she gave me the sound advice I might need. She was really like more than a mentor, like a big sister. And then after that once you kinda' get the ropes a little bit, you wanna' try to do things your own way to see if you can figure things out for yourself. (Jamal)

Johnathan recalled the various forms of navigational coaching provided by some of his professors, teaching assistants, peers, and from his older brother (a UofL alum), all of whom enabled him to forge a pathway to success.

I could say my professors, for the most part I could talk to them anytime, if I wasn't understanding anything. We had something where a teaching assistant (TA) would stay after. Basically somebody who had already learned the class, would give you an extra one-on-one session during the day. And those were probably, actually definitely the most helpful things in getting through classes. Then I would go to the people who had already taken the class and get the mentor sessions from them, and my grade in the class would jump drastically.

Some of my first biology teachers were telling us how you gotta' study different in college. They were basically weeding out all the stuff that you had to forget from high school. They were reminding you, for every hour of notes you take in class, you should study em' for three hours outside of class. It's like everything that they would tell us, we probably wouldn't do at first. Like yeah, we're in this class 3 hours a week, so we should be studying this 9 hours a week and you wouldn't. And that's how you would get burnt. So the professors would basically tell you how to pass their classes before you did it.

My brother was also influential to my success - giving me information about focus and seeing the end goal. He basically told me how in college you're gonna' see a lot of people and you can't have distractions. If there's 10,000 freshmen, by the time you all get to sophomore year, it's only gonna' be maybe like maybe 4,000. So you just gotta' make sure you're doing what you gotta' do to get out, maybe not let other people distract you. He was on me about the Oct. 1st FAFSA dates. He would remind me maybe 2 months before school would even start, about making sure you got the FAFSA in early. And making sure you could

maximize your money on it. Not just that, also financially, how I could navigate

through college with a work study job. I at least found a job though; I just didn't

do work study. For one, I worked with UPS overnights, but for the majority of the

time, Uber. Uber was really good in college because it allowed me to have a very

flexible schedule, and I could clock in whenever I wanted to. (Johnathan)

Keon reminisced on the detailed guidance received from his former partner (a

UofL graduate), as well as insights shared by the Black Male Initiative (BMI) director,

and a co-worker who was also a UofL student. Additionally, Keon described the

empathetic support exhibited by his workplace supervisor and the help extended from

staff members at an off-campus library.

> I relied on my partner at the time because he had already obtained his master's
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> from UofL. Even though we always get a tour of the campus and whatnot, he was
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> like, we're gonna' go on our own and do this. And so it very much was like, this
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> is this building, this is that building. Here's where you're gonna want to be
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> parking at. And I was able to kind of already map out, not like a career track, but
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> the Cardinal flight plan. He had already mapped out, like here are classes that I
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> think you would like, here are the professors. Here are what students have been
>
> saying on this website; a very analytical person which was very helpful for certain
>
> things.

> And I did meet the BMI director before he got into his role with BMI, so
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> he did help me with that. I don't think he remembers me, which is fine. I met with
>
> him before my entry, or right at the cusp, like navigating my academic path.

At the time I also had a co-worker who was finishing up her undergrad in the spring of 2020, and she and I, we would be able to just relate to one another, especially for midterms coming in. She's already at the desk studying; our supervisor knew that we were in college and would just help. If one of us was studying and needed a break to go and cry in the back, she was like, I got this. My Regal Library crew was also helpful; however the most influential person would be honestly, my former partner. (Keon)

Marcus reflected on resourceful information received from two classmates with whom he bonded, as well as scheduling assistance provided by his academic advisor. Despite experiencing personal and financial hurdles, Marcus also derived motivational support from professors and family members. He stated the most influential person contributing to his success was a friend who offered practical guidance, pointing out they shared the same academic major, but she was in a different cohort ahead of him.

I would say as I went through the program, I connected with my two classmates, like I said. The ones that I met in my initial research course. We kind of just connected and we bounced ideas and we discussed the dynamics of different classes and assignments through the program. I also had my academic advisor - she was really helpful in setting up my classes in a way that I could succeed.

My grandfather died during the middle of the program, so I think at one point I was getting ready to start a pharmacology class; it was totally unnecessary, but just to add to my coursework. And right in the beginning of that semester, cancer, dying; certainly the drain of making active family decisions. And I mean my instructors at the time were just so engaged in working with me, in giving me

a little bit of extra time. Or maybe moving this here, or moving that there, I mean the way the university worked was exceptional. In terms of my success in that program, I kind of went through this, I don't want to say isolated, but I have a support system, that particular support system were my family, but they were not super-involved with like, hey what are you doing with this class?'

I think for me, as I start to look at roadblocks, as I went through this program, the biggest roadblocks were always financial. And that was what led me to start working as a travel nurse. As soon as I started traveling and as soon as I was able to start making a little bit of money, the whole program got much easier. That's really the roadblock. Even in the first year, first few semesters, I had to drop some courses or whatever, so that I wasn't taxing myself financially. So yeah that's really what I viewed to be the biggest hurdle at the time.

The most influential person was probably my friend who was a few classes ahead of me. So how that would translate to other students might be a mentor or like an older sibling who may have gone through the same circumstances. But for me, my friend started this program, I want to say a semester before me. And so, as a result she could kind of guide me on what the pitfalls were, going into these classes, as well as some of the challenges that she faced. (Marcus)

Reginald conveyed that positive influencers upon his matriculation involved family members, particularly a sister of his who is also degreed, along with individuals at his employer which included a trusty supervisor and coworkers. Reginald also acknowledged vital assistance received from his academic advisor, and a supportive

counselor within UofL's Metro College program - a tuition reimbursement initiative for students who work at UPS.

For me, I can always say my family, just the encouragement and things like that. You know, was it always the type of support that I wanted from family? No, but I'm appreciative of 'any' type of support, if that makes any sense. My sister also provided more support as she's working on getting her master's, and she understands the heavy workload and how to balance. She's actually the last person that I would think would respect it, because she's always the first one to call me to do something, no matter what I have going on.

But I was surprised to see that with her understanding, she was more helpful with saying, "Hey Reg has to do this." Like if I'm not around and people are volun-telling, not volunteering, but volun-telling you to do something - she was gonna' say, he has this going on, even if she wasn't sure, but she knew that I had school, work, classes; and was kind of that buffer in between. So I really appreciated that type of support.

With my current place of employment, because I told them that I was getting back in school, my supervisor, he's a director now. He's not the kind of person that micromanages or nitpicks, so he understood that my workload is gonna be like this because I'm balancing this work dynamic. Because I've been with the company for so long, everybody else on the team also has that understanding too. So they understand that while I'm going through this period, the work that you normally get out of me, it's not that it's not there, but it's not as the way it was as if I didn't have as much going on. So I do appreciate support

from supervisors like that. Because to me, it's like what's understood, doesn't have to be explained. Because I've had jobs where they don't care if you go to school, they don't care if you have things going on in life. They don't care about work-life balance and then they have that added stress, where if you can't do this here, we're gonna have to let you go, so you can do this there. I didn't have that issue at my current place of employment.

When it came to more so direct support, I really leaned on my academic advisor. She was extremely helpful the entire time. Anytime I sent a message or I just needed to reach out, she was always on time. With the academic advisor, when it came to my studies and everything, it was just to be realistic. Because we kinda' played around with me doubling up on my last 4 classes over the summer. When I first started back, I was just doing 2 courses at a time, because I didn't want to overdo it. But I also didn't want to do another peak season at UPS. So we had a long discussion on how I was gonna' execute this summer. And surprisingly I actually came out with straight A's despite the fact that I did 4 classes. She guided me on the courses I needed to take and how heavy the workload would be. At first she was really trying to push for - do 2 for the summer and then finish up with the last 2 in the fall. But I'm like, I really want to try to push for 4.

I didn't want to do another peak season at UPS because I don't like manual labor. So ultimately it did work out in my favor. But that's where it all had to fall back on me, after I got the information that I needed from her. Even with the Metro College program, they were always on top of things. So when it came to academic support, I didn't have anything to worry about, from a school

standpoint. I did depend on the counselor from the Metro College program. It's

kind of the same with the Metro College counselor; just making sure I'm on track

in saying this is what I need to complete the program. And as long as they were

telling me that I was on the right track, then I was gonna' continue to do what I

was doing. (Reginald)

Theme 4: Race-Centric Encounters

Race and racism continue to function as sometimes subtle, yet notably toxic

elements within higher education - co-generating adverse effects which undermine and

even overshadow the positive experiences of Black men who matriculate on the

campuses of historically White institutions (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Davis et al.,

2007; Hargrove, 2014; Jennings, 2014; Johnson & Strayhorn, 2022). The following

accounts and lived experiences of participants within this study offer insights on

detrimental effects and lingering occurrences of racially driven manifestations of

mistreatment and injustice. Ahkeem described when a less qualified White individual was

appointed to a role for which he was highly qualified, and when expressing concerns,

Ahkeem received marginal support from the student organization advisor. He also

described perspectives and feelings about recurring racial microaggressions he was

subjected-to over the duration of his post-secondary pursuit.

There was a time during my undergraduate studies, like I said I was a devoted

member of a student organization, so I wanted to apply for the director position.

There was an application process, and interview process which I felt I did really

well in. And I ended up not getting the position, someone else got it. But I felt

slighted, and given the fact that I had spent a year in this organization. I had all

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the statistics, deliverables, and all the metrics across the board. I felt like I was even overqualified for the position, but I didn't end up getting it. And I was disappointed in the fact that the advisor didn't really advocate for me as much as I think they should have. So yeah, that's a point where I felt like I just really didn't belong and the experience I just described would be something I would consider as racist.

There's also microaggressions I experienced like pretty often at the university, especially within that same student organization. And you don't have necessarily someone that's gonna' affirm that experience when you do call it out. There may be some gaslighting that goes on that's like, "Are you sure? Well, I think you took it the wrong way, or I think you interpreted it this way." And it's like, "Oh okay, I guess it didn't happen." But it's an invalidation of how you feel in that moment. And I think it was something I thought about for a while. I feel like as a Black man, you're not really afforded that vulnerability. And I was grateful to have my roommates and even my counselor who was also a Black man to be able to share these experiences without feeling judged.

I feel like talking with the wrong people, you won't get that same emotional validation. And I feel like a lot of times people just either don't care or aren't really equipped to understand the context of the things that you're going through, like I said with microaggressions. Those are things that you experience so often, that unless it's someone who shares that same identity with you, they won't really understand it or get it. (Ahkeem)

Andre recounted when a professor openly expressed humor about a classic children's book which has racist overtones, as well as an instance where he was deliberately denied his preferred internship site, while his White peers received their desired sites without hesitation.

The first one would be with a professor within the college of education. I was the only Black person in any of my professional classes. So it was really important that I felt welcomed and felt like the space was meant for me and that I could be supported and just feel comfortable overall. This professor would say some off the wall kind of things sometimes. And I remember the most notable thing from him that he had said, was around the time Dr. Suess books were being taken off the shelves for a lot of the racism that was within them. He was giving out stickers. He would ask a question, we would raise our hand, and he was giving people stickers who answered the question correctly.

These stickers were of Dr. Suess, and I didn't really care for it. It didn't make me mad or anything, but what he said was what made me upset. So, as he was passing the stickers out, he was like, "Be sure to keep this one since they're taking his books off the shelf," and he kind of laughed when he said it. And I was just livid, just didn't know how to feel, like my heart was just racing. But I didn't want to wait until the end of class to address this, let's address this now. So I raised my hand, and I asked, "Can you tell me a little bit more of what you meant when you said that?" He was like, "ugh," and he didn't even explain it.

A White student chimed in, explaining that Dr. Suess books were being taken off the shelves for them being racist. And I felt he was trying to mansplain

it to me and I didn't appreciate that. Then I intervened and I said, "I'm not talking about the reason," I said, "He laughed when he said that." He never really gave me an explanation, and only said, "I didn't mean it in a way of being disrespectful. I just, you know, think it's interesting." We didn't dive further into that conversation. But like I said, that's when my academic coordinator came in, and I had that conversation with her. She followed up, and I can't remember who she followed up with. I also shared my concerns with a director. She was also involved in a lot of the issues I had as well, and was someone that I would express concerns about professors and the coordinators within the department. That was one of the biggest challenges I had.

There's a second one too. It involved an internship coordinator responsible for placing students for their student teaching for the semesters. And before student teaching happens, we do methods where we go to schools. It's almost like student teaching, but we're not actually student teaching, we're just watching, observing and interacting with the students and stuff like that. I was at Grant and Pierce schools, and I was placed at those schools for methods and everything went really well. The people from both schools were very adamant that I can come back for student teaching. But because of the student population demographic that I mostly identified with, and the ones I wanted to work with, I wanted to be at Carver; which were also recruiting for me to go and do my student teaching there. So next semester comes by, we get our placements - everyone else was saying, "Oh I asked so and so to put me at this school, and she put me there."

Just remembering that I was the only Black person within the program. Nearly everyone else was like, "Oh I got the school that I asked for - my school's principal had emailed this person and they made sure they put me at their school." And the school that I was assigned to was Buchanan which was the school that I didn't want and then I think another school that was way out on the east side. I went to the internship coordinator, and had a meeting with her and I asked, I was like, "The principal and my teachers at Carver both told me they advocated me for me to go to that school - what happened?" And she was like, "I don't take requests from the schools or the student teachers, that's an unfair practice" (just something something). And I explained that I thought it was unfair because my peers told me that they had - one in particular was a student that she was gonna' be hired at that school, so that's why they asked for her to be there. So I still thought that was unfair.

But what really kind of got it was that she said she just placed me where she thought I was best at. And ironically enough, the principal at Buchanan and this individual were really close. I remember one day after I was subbing - I substitute taught as well during the school year at Buchanan and other schools. The principal at Buchanan at the time was a White male. He told me, "You know I asked for you to be here." This was after I had got my student teaching placement, the student teaching had to start. The principal further stated, "You know the coordinator owed me a favor, so I asked her and made sure that I got you." And this rubbed me entirely the wrong way. I did not know what to feel, but once again I went to my academic coordinator and I went to the director. I'm like,

"This is what happened - this is what was said." And they validated my feelings

because it was almost like I'm just an object and even a slave almost. Like an

exchange for a favor, you're going to give someone a human being. I was the only

Black student, everyone else in my degree program cohort was White and the

coordinator was White. So that was another challenge I had faced while at UofL

that once again 2 supportive UofL staff members helped me walk through.

(Andre)

Jamal expressed that although he hadn't experienced distinct racism at UofL,

there were unity-focused campus gatherings wherein he participated which were

prompted by race-related incidents that were happening off-campus.

I never individually had any issues with racism. I do know at times there were

things going on in society that might have bled down onto campus, and in those

times where we as Black students came together for certain stuff that might've

happened on campus or as a sign of solidarity for stuff that was happening

everywhere else. But personally I never experienced any type of racism, because

honestly, I wasn't going for it. (Jamal)

Johnathan elaborated on a distressing incident where he felt racially profiled

while being detained by a campus police officer upon exiting the library after a late-night

study session. He also mentioned his discomfort with being prodded to speak, or even

write about the unyielding patterns of injustices committed against Black people,

particularly when the discussions were required in Johnathan's course assignments or

classroom dialogues. He also clarified the disdain, unjustifiably low expectations and

delusional assumptions which are often made when a Black student is placed in a study group among all White individuals.

Usually whenever you go to the library, like you gotta' park near the library; but of course when there's a game, they block a whole lotta stuff off. So they were forcing everyone to park in that main parking garage, the one in the center of the campus. And I was in the library studying for a test, so I was there all day, and didn't eventually come out of the library until like 12 or 1 in the morning. And by the time I came out, the volleyball game was over, so I'm just a Black guy walking through the parking garage, going to get my car. And because the game was over, like at first they had the little arms up so people can drive in. But by the time it's late at night, the arms are back down because I've been in the library so long.

Long story short, a campus police officer saw me and my friend walking to my car from the library. We asked him to raise up the arm and it kind of turned into him profiling us. And he said he smelled stuff in the car, he eventually searched the car and stuff. And he told us that the reason he did all of that is because there have been criminals stealing people's stuff from their cars. Basically he kind of profiled us, and he didn't really listen to our story. That was a long situation in itself. But we were students that were trying to get out of the parking garage, and he didn't listen to why we were there. And instead assumed that we could've been engaged in wrongdoings.

What's crazy is we were leaving, it was actually probably around 12:30am to 12:45am, and I had a test that next morning at maybe 8am. He basically put us

through a hassle and we weren't able to leave. We probably got caught up at 12:30am; we didn't leave the parking garage until maybe 2:00am in the morning. It's like he purposefully was kind of being a smart-a', and kind of took forever to do his job.

Okay so racism is kind of tricky because I've never had racism like someone calling me the n-word or anything like that. Ahh, but I guess on that point, maybe not directly to me as a person; but the situation with Breonna Taylor happening in Louisville. I don't really know how to explain it, but a lot of things were awkward. And it was awkward in class; especially the gen-ed classes. It's almost like, I'm not sure if we were being baited, because she was Black and things that were happening, we sort of had to answer to stuff like that a little more; like talk about em' in class. And we had prompts to where both of the prompts basically forced you to give your opinion on the situation.

To me, it's just uncomfortable having to speak for Black people in front of a whole bunch of...I don't really know how to explain it. Like, just because you're Black and you're in a PWI, it's almost like the PWI is reaching out to see how you feel about the situation, even if you would usually be the person that doesn't speak on it. Does that make sense? I mean I'd rather have my own opinion on the situation and just keep it to myself, rather than having to share it through papers or whatever.

I just feel like the Black Lives Matter movement and all of it going on in Louisville, it just kinda'...I don't know if it was a divide or if it was just awkward, because there were a lot of people that were definitely into it and doing

the marches and stuff. And then there's people that you could tell were just supporting it just because it was the thing to do. It was just a whole bunch of…I don't like mixing politics with school, or my personal life period. It's just very divisive.

Unless you're like this guy that just comes off as like, you gotta' do everything perfect. I don't know if it's just me, but just being looked at as the Black guy, you're not gonna' be looked at as the smartest one in the group. Yeah and also of course, you know how it goes, things like that will stop you from speaking when you feel like you know something, or speak up less than you should, or less than you would maybe if you were in groups that were all Black, or more accepting.

So I could notice like in some of my group projects, especially in the classes where it would be like the 300 level. It's like they weren't, they weren't really excited - not that you should be excited, but they weren't too psyched about being in a group with me. Instead of it being a mutual trust, it was more so they were in my group because they had to be. We would talk when we had to. You know it wasn't really mutual trust or trying to form a friendship or a bond that you would with maybe a student that would have more in common with you, but more so just, let's do this work together and get it done and talk to each other as least as possible. (Johnathan)

Keon shared his thoughts that incidents of racism may not have happened to him because most of his degree program was completed online, which could have prevented

him from having the typical direct in-person racial interactions with others who do not share his ethnicity.

I did not experience any just due to the situation, the timing, speaking of the virtual classes. My path at UofL was August 2019, all online classes. And spring 2020, where I had three classes in person that stopped during spring break, and went straight virtual for the full year. Then we didn't return to class until January 2021; whereas I then had one class which was taught by a Pan African Studies professor. (Keon)

Marcus did not recollect having any racist encounters at UofL but disclosed being subjected to an abundance of them at a university in Missouri. He mentioned that classmates in his degree program at UofL freely discussed health disparities affecting Black communities, and although he was the only Black man in his online degree cohort, Marcus could not recall any instances of observed racism.

I can't say that I experienced that there. I have at a prior institution in Missouri. I can give you more subject matter than you care to hear about regarding the university I attended in Missouri. At the University of Louisville, we had some classmates that when we would give responses to prompts in class, some of these people would give reflections based on their lived experience. And their lived experience a lot of times would be something relating to race or health disparities in the Black community.

What would racism look like if it did pop up? It may be some students maybe not commenting as much on those particular posts. But I think it's a complex issue that not everybody knows how to respond to appropriately. I saw

Black women, I didn't see other Black men, but I saw many Black women in my program and I mean they were fully themselves. And I don't feel like they had to sit there and code switch for example in order to fit in. I felt like they were well facilitated in these programs. Now granted I don't feel like they were thrown out there some crazy topics you know, polarizing topics or anything like that. But overall I don't feel like I experienced any. (Marcus)

Reginald recounted feeling uncomfortable and disconnected in a particular course taken during the first time he enrolled at UofL. Additionally, he mentioned a detrimental experience which occurred at a different university in Kentucky, where he unjustifiably received a much lower grade than his White peers on a group assignment, likely due to his race.

I would have to say it was in the early 2000's when I was actually on campus. I didn't really go on a tour when I transferred to UofL, so walking trying to find classes proved to be difficult. And then there was this one class, I think it's communications in particular, where I'm not bad at it; but there should have been no reason why I was struggling with that course. I did not feel like I belonged, and I did not feel like I belonged with the students. I didn't feel like the professor liked me. So back then I wasn't as vocal as I am now, and I probably should have spoken up at that time back then. Versus, had I had that experience now, oh definitely something would have been said, or we would have gotten to the root of it. I just kind of went to class and left. I didn't really dive into reaching out to see who I could find at UofL when I had that situation with that particular professor. I

just remember sitting in the class and trying to figure out, why is it going the way

it's going?

Before I did transfer to UofL, I had a different communications class

where the professor gave me a D. But I already felt that the situation was slighted

against me, because she put me on a team (it was a group project) with three other

students. They were all White males. And they got higher grades in the course

whereas I did not, and the reason is, she supposedly blamed it on "my lack of

understanding" or things that I said. The things that I wrote and the things that I

did, mirrored my three other peers. I'm still confused as to why I got the lesser

grade. So that was something that put a bad taste in my mouth. But being that it's

Morehead and it's in the middle of the Daniel Boone Forest, I'm not surprised

that it kind of went that way. (Reginald)

Theme 5: Mutual Trust Dynamics

Individuals who are members of a formal or informal group typically foster norms

of trust, as well as rules of cooperation and reciprocity to achieve desired outcomes

(Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1995; Yosso, 2005). Participants in this research study

described how mutual trust served a constructive purpose and influenced certain aspects

of their post-secondary experience. Ahkeem described how the trust-based relationships

he established with his roommates resulted in transparency, communal acceptance, and

shared understanding.

I'd say my roommates; the friends that I made through participation in my

scholarship program. Like I said, I lived with them; I have known them since my

freshman year, and then I lived with them two years, junior and sophomore year. I

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could tell them anything, such as full disclosure with a lot of things and not

necessarily have to feel like, oh I'll be judged, or I'll feel a certain type of way

when I say this. And I knew that they'd always affirm my feelings and what I was

feeling or what I had experienced, rather than like other instances or talking with

other people who may not necessarily give me that same validation. (Ahkeem)

Andre recalled the solid trust dynamics between him and his supervisor which

evolved over an extended time period through candid and ongoing communications,

resulting in him feeling authentically affirmed, as well as encouraged.

Yeah, with my first year as a resident assistant, I'd probably say my supervisor at

the time. He was the hall director of the building I was in. He was someone that I

trusted to tell my issues to, and someone I knew that would support me.

Additionally, he was also a Black man too, so it was someone that I saw on a

daily basis, and interacted with and shared those experiences, shared those

conversations, those difficulties with that individual. That's someone that I felt

like I was able to build trust in and have that super-important communication

with. (Andre)

Antwon reminisced on projects requiring direct collaboration with student

organizations, and how mutual reliance on one another in executing their designated roles

actually heightened the overall attendance from students across UofL's campus.

UofL's National Pan Hellenic Council, when I was working with the athletic

retail brand ambassadorship, they were a part of many of the events that we had

done, in just bringing student life out. And we had collaborated with them on the

spring break event, them along with many other organizations, but the entire Pan

Hellenic Council. We just had to really count on them to bring the initial life of

the party, so people would come and notice it and just kinda' become more

attracted to what was going on. So that was something that was out of my control

completely, but what was in my control was to gather everything else needed for

the event, and have it placed there on time. (Antwon)

Donte alluded to the trust factor regarding one of his professors who discussed

historical acts of medical bias and discrimination committed specifically against Black

patients. Moreover, promoting the equitable treatment of every medical patient inspired a

magnitude of trust within Donte towards his professor.

So we had a class; the course we were taking involved a talk about health

disparities, and our teacher was White. With this topic, the White students seemed

to not be feeling comfortable with the subject matter, in a way that hadn't

happened before. The subject we were talking about was the way injections were

wrongfully given to Black men and the way a Black woman was mistreated

during surgery without any anesthesia. It was very challenging for the White

students to feel comfortable. That was a good thing how the White teacher could

talk about it and raise the awareness about health disparities; so that I can value

all races beyond him just talking about his own race. He was trying to raise the

awareness so that everybody can know, we shouldn't just do this. And that we

have to work to protect the environment, protect humans, and protect and value

the human race without treating people differently because they are Black or

White. (Donte)

Jamal clearly expressed his experience in cultivating bonds of mutual trust between himself and the Black fraternity he joined while pursuing his degree. He described the shared expectations about responsibilities and the advantages to be reaped by both him and the organization.

> In my undergrad experience just being a part of my fraternity. They trust me that I'm not gonna' do anything to mess up the chapter's name. And I trust them that they're gonna' leave me with tools to succeed, not just here in school, but later on in life. And so we're both feeding off each other. (Jamal)

Johnathan recalled times when he and his roommates agreed to stick together as a group whenever having to walk across UofL's campus after nightfall. This practice served as a safety measure and displayed the associated connections of trust fostered among themselves.

> This is just kind of tough, cause' like in a lot of things throughout life, I'm pretty independent and I kind of like doing things myself. Actually I guess since we can talk about anything, I'll definitely talk about mutual trust would be with my roommates. We'd often have things like RAVE alerts going around the campus, and people know that bad things can happen in Louisville. Just my roommates that I was randomly given, we'd always have each other's backs, or if we do a walk late at night or something like that, I guess we look out for each other. We go to the gym together. So basically when you do most things around campus together, it kind of minimizes the risk factor of possibly being victimized, if that makes sense. (Johnathan)

Keon described the reciprocal trust shared amongst the students in his LGBTQ studies course. Despite everyone having differing identities or attractions, at no time was there an expectation for anyone to disclose or compromise their confidentiality.

> I will say mutual trust when we were in Dr. Legend's classes. Primarily because it was a mixture of both, well people of all sexualities, and nobody was going to be asking people what theirs were. Nobody should kind of speculate and whatnot, so it's just very much, everybody's neutral. If you feel comfortable saying it, awesome. If you don't, awesome. We're not going to sit there and ponder and talk about it, because some people were not ready to out themselves. Some people were still discovering who they were. Several of the students in there were straight, straight men and women. So it's just one of those things where it's like, you really just didn't know. So I felt like that was a good, nice mutual trust. (Keon)

Marcus expressed appreciation for instructors trusting his authenticity in the complete disclosure of a daunting family challenge he encountered, which then enabled Marcus to trust his professors as they demonstrated identifiable empathy and deliberate consideration.

> I think like I said when my grandfather was passing away, I really needed understanding from my instructor because I did sign up for that course. I did have another research class or something like that. I did sign up for that course, and the syllabus was laid out for me ahead of time, but life threw me a curve ball. So while I was dealing with just the chaos of adult protective services and hospice and all of these various things, almost Monday through Friday; every Sunday I

had a paper due, and truth be told, the paper was less important than the things that were going on. But my instructors put me in a position where they would let me complete my responsibilities, while also being able to tend to the needs that I had. Not only that, but sometimes they would just shoot me a message in the middle of the week and say, "Hey just checking, how are things going?" Which I found to be, hopefully I don't have this rosy vision of UofL, but I really appreciated instructor engagement. I found that to be really helpful. (Marcus)

Reginald recounted how during a group assignment, one of his classmates readily assumed a leadership role which then required trust from the group members, as she in turn had to also trust that each member would actively fulfill their respective obligations.

So they have the GroupMe app for some classes. And with one of the classes that I recently had, we had to do a group project. I think it was in my spring semester, yeah. And the thing that I like about it, is normally when I'm in group settings, I don't mind taking on a leadership role, but if I can get out of it, I definitely will. So I was actually pleasantly surprised when one of the team members, she actually took control of the group, along with who's going to do what. Like I said, it didn't bother me because I already had a lot going on, on my plate. So I thought it was very positive how she kept up with the group. She kept us organized, and wasn't rude about it, but she made suggestions.

Those are things that I like in a group dynamic, where if you're gonna' be able to take control, make it make sense. And I felt like that was very positive. I even told her after, I said, "Hey, I appreciate you taking charge of the group, because without that, we wouldn't have been able to do what we did without you

setting the tone and organizing everything, so that way we all would stay on

track." Not saying that everyone else in the group was disorganized, but I just like

the fact that, this is what we're doing and this is where we're going, you know.

That's a positive for me, this is what you need from me, got it, you got it.

(Reginald)

Theme 6: Network Benefits

There can be numerous tangible and intangible benefits to which individuals have

access when they are members of any organization or network (structured or

unstructured), regardless of the size (Al-Fadhli & Kersen, 2010; Compton, 2016;

Goleman, 2001, Jones, 2017; Landy, 2005). Ahkeem articulated the various benefits from

opportunities to brainstorm and collaborate on assignments, as well as cohesively prepare

for exams or tests with some of his classmates.

You're in a group of likeminded individuals with similar classes, so you have

people who can remind you, "Oh this assignment's coming up." Or you have a

group that you can collaborate with, share ideas with and get feedback from,

things of that nature - study with as well. Study groups are pretty helpful, that's

something I utilized as well. So those are probably the main benefits. (Ahkeem)

As a transfer student, Andre revealed how his circle of newfound associates

supported his acclimation to UofL, and upon meeting housing staff members at an on-

campus gathering, the groundwork was laid to secure a job as a resident assistant.

Furthermore, Andre's cohort of peers within his degree major enabled him to also build a

lasting rapport with students who shared his ethnicity.

I think that social satisfaction, for sure. Transferring from one institution to another, you know freshman year is when everybody, they get their friend groups, they make their circles and things like that. So me, leaving mine at a different university, and coming to UofL where people already had theirs established, I felt like an outcast. So being able to be welcomed within those groups and continue those friendships, I definitely feel like it was a domino effect, that I was satisfied socially, but then also it helped me perform better in my classes. I could ask them for help; we would just do homework together, or just even when I do my work, I'm not stressed emotionally because I am satisfied emotionally and socially. That's a very informal circle group; nothing was like, hey let's be friends. It just naturally happened.

I think also my interactions with those individuals within the housing department. Before I became an RA, I was a desk assistant and I just went to the events where these individuals would be at; got familiar with them, talked with them, introduced myself. And that benefitted myself, because I was able to get the RA role, and they were familiar with who I was, and what I did and what I believed and how I interacted with people. So they were very supportive of me becoming an RA. I think another informal group that I was part of was actually in one of my lecture classes. It was a gen-ed, I think it was bio. I had a little friend group in there as well; some that I had other gen-eds with, and that also just satisfied socially. So those were some groups that satisfied me and helped me stay motivated as well.

A formal group would be my academic major program; just being

connected with other individuals that wanted to be teachers. Of course there were

some that were older than me that were about to graduate, and there were some

that were just getting into the university. I didn't really share like class level, but

sharing that connection with them and seeing other Black individuals who were

interested in becoming teachers; and sharing our connection of Louisville and

connection to all over campus as well. That's formal and informal, but I would

say my beneficial connections came more so from the informal side. (Andre)

Antwon reminisced how his interactive role as a campus ambassador for a major

athletic brand helped to enhance his professional skill set, honed interpersonal abilities,

and improved aspects of self-assurance during his undergraduate experience.

I think the benefits were added confidence, a support system, relativity, and sense

of belonging. Confidence was gained through hands on experiences where I was

made directly responsible for ensuring a positive outcome at events for an

international athletic retail brand. I also became really comfortable with myself

internally due to the frequency of social interactions. It was mandatory that I had

a solid sense of self because I was using my personal image to reflect someone

else's brand, so it gave me confidence in relationship building while strengthening

my business acumen. (Antwon)

Donte reflected on the moral support he received from family friends and made

mention of assistance with being transported to and from UofL's campus. The

transportation was needed due to being involved in a serious car accident which

prevented him from being able to drive.

Okay, I got you. So first of all it was encouragement, trust and then support. The support I received was transportation because I got injured in a car accident, so I couldn't drive to the university. But Ms. Ecole was coming to pick me up and would take me to the university, and then she came back to UofL to take me home. I also had a surgery, and Mr. Ecole also provided me with groceries during that challenging time. There was so much support. (Donte)

Jamal elaborated on the resources accessed through networking which led to exploring potential job opportunities and resulted in a pathway for him to be readmitted at UofL to finish his bachelor's degree. Jamal also recounted how his college affiliations and engagement enabled him to develop event planning skills and noticeably improved his time management abilities.

I think one of the biggest things I received was a degree of networking. I've met so many people. They'll at least give me a shot somewhere, like an interview, get me to that point. They may not be able to get me the job unless they're personally over it. But they're like hey, I can get you on the doorsteps here, and then it's up to you to seal the deal. That's probably the biggest thing, like any of the organizations I've been a part of.

For instance, me knowing the CONECT advisor the way I did, and off that she's like, I think we can get you back into school. I don't think she would have necessarily did that for somebody who she may have not seen a certain drive in that person. She might be like; well why would we waste money or something on somebody we know who's gonna' do this and they'll be out of school again. She felt that drive and passion in me.

So yeah that's definitely the biggest thing networking. Everything else is hand to hand, time management skills, things like that, how to put events together, not just formal events but like you were saying, informal things as well. Other stuff I might have been involved with, just learning ropes like that, but networking is easily the biggest. (Jamal)

Johnathan recalled the closeness and belonging cultivated amidst African American students on a college campus having a majority White population. He expressed how certain connections were strengthened each year among those who were successfully retained, and how social events served as a means to de-stress, as well as create a practical sense of balance.

Why I wanted to move to Louisville, it's kind of like I wanted to be closer to - I think Louisville in all has a higher percentage of Black people. Well when you're a minority in general in the White world, it's like it brings you closer together, especially in institutions such as a PWI. Because it's like, okay there's 30,000 people here and on the campus of Blacks, it's like, it just seems like a handful. So just having Blacks in a majority White institution, that know your background, kind of know you - know who you are. That definitely helps, just things like seeing Black people.

Knowing how many Black people dropped off after maybe the first two years, and then seeing Black people still there, after three or four years, your bond grew stronger with them. Because it's like you're the strong ones and you were the ones that were lasting. If that sort of make sense. Like there's already such a small number of us here. There's an even smaller number of us who are gonna' be

here next year, and there's an even smaller number that's gonna graduate. So we might as well have each other's back, as the thing goes on, and that's what we had.

Even things like the frats and stuff. Things like the Black frat organizations. It's not like it was just about the frat. It was just about bringing all the Black people out regardless, so those were great times of community. And it was definitely social and academic. Cause like when you're in college, it's like, yeah you can be all school, school, school, but you eventually gonna' burn out. So it's good to have those lil' social things to kinda' get your mind off of, give you a break from the school, school, school aspect. Like, yeah, we're all in college and it's three months in; we all just had midterms, and we may have F's or D's in class, but it's good to have something going on to maybe take your mind off of that, for once. And it's like we're all failing together for now, or struggling together.

We also had trauma bonds, of course. Like, we were bonding because we were all going through the same hell. Well I'm actually not sure if I used the word right. Because I actually heard trauma bonding being like; I think that can be some abuse too, like you're addicted to your abuser. But that was a term we definitely used in college and I also hear it used on jobs too. (Johnathan)

Keon described the relatability of coworkers and being able to vent about challenges pertaining to matriculation as a non-traditional student having additional identities. He also acknowledged his desire to be involved on campus, but could not do so because of personal matters and interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I feel like you always receive support from colleagues because y'all know what's

going on. You're able to kind of convey just how stressed you are. You're able to

convey certain, I don't want to say annoyances, but you're able to relate to one

another much more. It gets deeper when you have a group of non-traditional

students, when you have a group of students of color, of first-generation students.

There are nuances that occur in all of these communities that other

students won't understand. Cause you can have a group of students of color, but

they may be second, third-gen college students and what not, so they won't get

first-gen stuff. Or you can have first-gen White students that relate more so to

Black first-gen students. So it's just one of those, yeah you can get support

resources from those individuals, just depending on your needs at the time.

I wanted to get involved in certain things. At the time I was going through

some personal things when I was going to campus in 2020. And then as we all

know, COVID happened and everything was kind of like ripped away anyway, so

it just happened. (Keon)

Marcus conveyed how his professional network provided access to useful

knowledge, and he disclosed academic benefits derived from relationships formed with

various students. He also clarified his internal responsibility towards succeeding, as well

as how peers often provide a range of positive influences.

I guess just by virtue of just being a nurse, and a critical care nurse, I had access

to individuals around me who understood advance concepts, so if I'd be

struggling with something, I could ask them. Like in the pathophysiology class for

example, or things like that, my colleagues understood medicine and

pharmacology; you know I was able to see a lot of different things. I also had access to some of the best anesthesiologists and general surgeons in the country, while I was at the clinic. Again that helps with perspective; I have people that can talk to me about different pathos and about different disease processes and stuff like that. So I guess in some way, I benefitted that way.

I didn't really engage with too many communities at UofL, I guess that would be formal, informal would be more of just my little social network that I created, of students as we went through this program. So like I said, I had two friends. We met during one of the first classes, and we kind of stayed connected, because our thought process was just stick together, we can kind of bounce ideas with these assignments, so we kind of know what to expect. Collaborating on assignments, well not necessarily collaborating on assignments, but collaborating on expectations of assignments. Like, hey what do they mean by this? How did you approach this? What did you think about this particular graph or chart? We would send each other little text messages that would say things like, remember we've got an assignment due tonight at midnight. Small things like that helped keep things intact.

Just kind of keeping each other accountable and keeping each other on track. A lot of mine was sort of intrinsic, you know little things. I went to church a lot throughout my program which was really helpful. And aside from that it was really keeping a clear vision about what the end goal was, knowing my path to get to that goal. And making sure I had people along the way to kind of guide me along that path was what my approach was. (Marcus)

Reginald clarified the worthwhile advantages provided through his employment, which included monetary compensation, intangible support, and tuition assistance as a crucial means of funding to successfully complete his bachelor's degree.

Well I guess the formal group would be UPS, because I was at UPS before I got back in school and just kind of wanted to make some extra money. But then I heard about the [tuition] program, and when I went back [to UofL]; then I'm already in school and it comes up again. I'm like okay, well while I'm here, why not utilize the program? The benefit of that is of course the extra money, the free tuition. I didn't benefit from sleep - I'm getting that back, but I got a lot of benefits out of being in there. Even though UPS is not an atmosphere, it's not an occupation that I would prefer. I definitely got a lot of benefits out of it, because it offered me something more than just a paycheck. Yeah, I don't like manual labor, but I will tell anybody, if you want to get a job and if you want to go to school free, I will definitely hype up UPS; I just won't be there. I did what I needed to. (Reginald)

Member Checking

After transcribing each of the study participants' responses to the open-ended interview questions, relevant themes and codes were methodically identified using the six-step process detailed in chapter three. Initial drafts of the data analyses were emailed directly to the respective interviewees in order to confirm accuracy of the written results. Consequently, several study participants requested minor changes and also inquired about pseudonyms used for anonymity regarding certain individuals they mentioned in their responses. Most of the interviewees did not request any edits and expressed their

agreement with the accuracy in thematic interpretations of their responses to the 15 open-ended interview questions, and sub-questions.

Peer Review Processes

A systematic review was completed by an impartial peer, Dr. Derrick R. Brooms who is a seasoned scholar and extensively published author of phenomenological research on Black collegiate men. He thoroughly reviewed this study's qualitative research design, as well as the data findings derived from the analyses and concluded that my research processes and methods were fundamentally sound and credible. Dr. Brooms did note a few verb tense errors, and upon being informed of these, the specific edits were completed immediately. Additionally, an audit trail was conducted by Dr. Kia Marie Pruitt, an educational researcher who earned a doctor of philosophy degree from UofL with a background in phenomenological research and qualitative design on studies involving African American men. She performed a detailed audit of my journal notes, study participants' responses to interview questions, and the research memos to ensure analytic findings supported the data. Upon completing her examination, Dr. Pruitt concluded that the dissertation's findings, processes, data analyses and protocols were accurately completed in accordance with the rigorous standards of phenomenological research.

Summary

Data analysis from the open-ended interviews resulted in six major themes conveying the lived experiences of nine research participants who are first-generation African American men that earned bachelor's degrees from the University of Louisville over the last three years. The essence and experiential perspectives of the interviewees

reflected an alignment with specific research data which was previously expounded upon

within the review of literature in chapter two. Chapter five, the concluding section of this

study provides a discussion on the emergent findings, along with implications for policy

and practice, as well as recommendations for future research involving thematic

components of this dissertation and its purposeful design.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The closing chapter of this qualitative study discusses the six thematic findings which emerged from detailed responses to one-on-one, open-ended semi-structured interviews from nine research participants. These themes emanated from a 15-question interview protocol designed to answer the dissertation's three overarching research questions which are:

RQ1: What aspects of social capital do African American men ascribe to their college degree completion at the University of Louisville?

RQ2: What are the experiences and perspectives on social capital among first-generation African American men who are graduates from the University of Louisville?

RQ3: In what way/s did the participant's racial identity/ies affect his undergraduate college experience/s at the University of Louisville?

Additionally, the six predominant themes which resulted from a six-step qualitative analysis method are identified as 1. a notable sense of belonging; 2. resourceful college relationships; 3. co-navigators of academic success; 4. race-centric encounters; 5. mutual trust dynamics; and 6. benefits of the network. With respect to this phenomenological dissertation's findings, relevant implications for policy and practice

will also be discussed, as well as recommendations for future research concerning the cognate areas of this academic study. As noted in chapters one and two, using an ontological philosophical assumption, my analyses were conducted through the interpretative lenses of critical theory, critical race theory and social capital theory concurrently. The function of these approaches was to disclose practical considerations for addressing age-old disparities in retention and graduation outcomes among Black collegiate men.

Findings

Considering the dissertation's purpose to explore the influence of social capital on bachelor's degree completion of first-generation African American men at UofL, this study's three research questions yielded the following themes from nine participants' one-on-one interview data.

Research Question 1

What aspects of social capital do African American men ascribe to their college degree completion at the University of Louisville?

This question sought to identify relational dynamics and collaborative connections which potentially provided tangible or intangible benefits related to degree attainment (St. John, 2013; Tabrizi, 2020; White, 2016).

Resourceful college relationships. The study participants described meaningful peer-based interactions from cohorts of close friendships which developed organically through classroom interactions, and during various social or recreational activities (Barton & Coley, 2010; Lin, 2001). These primarily same-race and diverse social networks involved on- and off-campus engagement which occurred across the span of their undergraduate

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experience, and beyond. Outcomes resulting from such relationships included study groups to prepare for exams and jointly work on class projects (Strayhorn, 2019). Recurring check-ins transpired among students for shared support and reminders on upcoming assignments. In addition to doing homework together, these individuals holistically encouraged, inspired, and validated each other, especially after experiencing a range of microaggressions or other unexpected personal challenges (Renn, 2003).

Co-navigators of academic success. The interviewees conveyed that persons who further contributed to their academic success fulfilled considerable roles such as professors, academic advisors, older siblings with college degrees, UofL program coordinators, supervisors and co-workers, as well as personal companions (Barton & Coley, 2010; Clarke, 2020; Lin, 1999). These various individuals provided mentoring influences which occurred through maternal, as well as paternal guidance and life advice on goalsetting, time management, access to financial resources, course selection, and academic coaching (Baker & Griffin, 2010; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014).

Benefits of the network. Regarding structured and unstructured connections, members of the sample within this study communicated reaping certain advantages such as group synergy, potential job opportunities, constructive friendships, emotional and social satisfaction, empathy, and academic support (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1990; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Additional resources which were accessed included tuition assistance, financial support, accountability, as well as added confidence (Lin, 2001). Proactive guidance, collective encouragement, brainstorming on course assignments, as well as cultural relatedness were also among the benefits accessed by these first-generation college graduates (Barton & Coley, 2010).

Research Question 2

What are the experiences and perspectives on social capital among first-generation African American men who are graduates from the University of Louisville?

This question focused on illuminating the spectrum of experiential interactions, situational phenomena, as well as outcomes and sentiments resulting from the interviewees' formal and informal relationships (Bozionelos & Bozionelos, 2018; Compton, 2016; Gardner, 1983; Zeidner et al., 2009).

Sense of belonging. The study participants shared various descriptions of close connections to UofL through belongingness (Karcher, 2001; Strayhorn, 2019). The variation of environmental and circumstantial descriptions included building meaningful dialogue with professors, meeting students who became good friends, initially noticing similarities in the cohort, peer advocacy regarding LGBTQ identities, and feelings of shared affirmation during same-race interactions (Cuyjet, 1997). Other emotions of belonging transpired during mass appreciation upon earning a meritorious award, also after being notified of admission to UofL, as well as in successfully coordinating a well-attended campus event, and through the ultimate goal of graduating (Gopalan & Brady, 2019).

Mutual trust. Interviewees reflected on bonds of shared trust established with classmates, professors, supervisors, roommates, and even when collaborating with student organizations (Coleman, 1990). The trust dynamics were exhibited through empathetic understanding from professors after the passing of a collegian's loved one, also with a classmate taking charge to lead a group project, and when roommates walked in clusters during nighttime strolls across campus. Moreover, trust occurred with modes

of transparency when a student worker shared inner struggles with his supervisor and was not judged, and regarding classmates not being compelled to disclose their sexual orientation (Yosso, 2005). Other instances of reciprocal trust included the belief that students organizing events would each carry their load, and with a White professor discussing health disparities while valuing quality of life for all populations. One student member expected to learn success principles from a fraternity with that organization anticipating ethical conduct in return (Putnam, 1995)).

Research Question 3

In what way/s did the participant's racial identity/ies affect his undergraduate college experience/s at the University of Louisville?

This question was an inquiry about any racialized phenomena the participants had experienced or were subjected to (Brown-Nagin, 2014; Lee, 1993; Roediger, 1991).

Race-centric encounters. The sample population of this study described instances of racial mistreatment and discrimination which included a professor chuckling as he passed out stickers from a Dr. Suess book having racist overtones, and a White internship coordinator denying a Black participant his preferred internship site while granting White students theirs (Glesne, 2016). There is also an account of a White campus police officer profiling, detaining and searching the car of a Black interviewee as he was leaving the library after a late-night study session, as well as multiple racial and gender-based microaggressions occurring across UofL's campus (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Other incidents involved disdain or racial indifference toward Black students from White members of course study groups, and discriminatory treatment of a Black first-year student by his White communications professor (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Study

participants also mentioned receiving superficial advocacy from a student organization advisor, being prodded during class discussions to serve as a spokesperson for Black issues, and a lack of remedy, validation or acknowledgement when microaggressions or acts of racial discrimination were recounted, as well as reported (Hechter & Horne, 2003; Hiraldo, 2010).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The analyses of the six thematic findings resulting from lived experiences of the nine research participants offer data-informed insights toward transforming the culture of HWI's, as well as enhancing rates of retention and degree completion of first-generation African American men. The authentic responses from dissertation interviewees revealed that social capital is a multi-faceted apparatus which equipped them with identifiable resources to successfully earn their baccalaureate credentials. The value derived from both their formal and informal connections should be amplified and replicated to benefit future collegians across every demographic. Considering the dismal statistics on national degree completion rates for the larger population involving this study, higher education stakeholders and leaders are urged to swiftly implement more effective, and individualized policies and practices to cultivate social capital towards promptly improving degree attainment for first-generation Black men.

Prioritizing college completion initiatives for underserved students should not begin merely in elementary, secondary or post-secondary environments, but should start at the very pinnacles of American leadership, such as with the Office of the United States President, the Secretary of Education, federal and state legislators, all governors across America, higher education accrediting agencies, state departments of education, as well

as P-12 boards of education. Dedicated funding streams must be endorsed through collegiate boards of trustees, presidents and chancellors of universities and colleges, also by diversity, equity and inclusion officers, as well as with all deans, faculty chairs, professors and higher education staff members. Each of these influential agents and entities must become and remain conscientious about the gravity of their roles as stewards of human potential, especially given the multi-generational and exponential advantages of a post-secondary education. Without the allocation of comprehensive funding commitments cascading from the highest echelons of every collegiate institution, meager resources, normative vulnerabilities and disparaging outcomes are very likely to continue for marginalized student populations.

Findings derived from the study participants' shared experiences involving social capital should prompt an immediate sense of urgency across ecosystems of higher education leadership. Most post-secondary institutions tout a cluster of past achievements in diversity, and it may be reasonable to disclose what has already been accomplished. However, to rest on laurels is quite counter-productive, especially when somber figures associated with Black men's graduation and retention rates continue to loom large. Moreover, with repeated manifestations of overt racism occurring within classrooms and across the periphery of PWI campuses, these toxic incidents can trigger waves of emotional fatigue and academic discouragement for Black men. Consequently, there must be a sustained uplift of cultural values (amongst every post-secondary employee) to advocate and promote mutual respect, as well as dignity while fostering a singular magnitude of belonging for each and every student.

A fiscally prudent approach could be to determine the percentage of Black men enrolled within a given PWI, and then calculate the actual percentage amount of the institution's overall budget that is intently being allocated towards the programmatic retention and graduation outcomes of Black men. Additionally, administrators must quantify what percentages of collegiate Black men's aggregated tuition revenue is being reinvested towards this student population's belongingness, retention and graduation. Such calculations with the resulting percentages can be appropriately termed as components of an institution's Black men's monetary retention quotient (BMMRQ) or Black men's monetary graduation quotient (BMMGQ). Another action plan involves endlessly tracking the differences in rates of retention and graduation of Black men in contrast to various other student populations. These glaring variations serve as a concrete justification for making immediate gap-closing investments (GCI) toward supportive programs to intently improve Black collegiate men's institutional experiences, retention and graduation rates within PWI's.

Lingering disparities in tertiary success and life outcomes of African American men have been apparent throughout North America for multiple decades. Therefore, it behooves higher education leaders to implement financial parity and monetary equity to turn this prevailing tide. Without question, there is an evidence-based rationale to resolve collegiate performance gaps, as the analyses from the data within this dissertation study sheds light on the mechanism of social capital and its relevance to academic achievement and degree attainment. Performance-based funding requirements around retention and graduation offer an added rationale for post-secondary leaders to take definitive action,

beyond socially responsible quotes expressed in mission statements or equity-themed promises etched across institutional strategic plans.

To expedite the success of first-generation collegiate Black men, post-secondary institutions should immerse these collegians with an indelible understanding of social networks and their relevance toward degree completion. Thus, instructional concepts of social capital should be embedded within core elements of the first-year orientation experiences, as well as within curricula of all general education courses. Doing so is likely to enable Black collegians to adapt and capitalize on the relational and academic benefits of social capital, while keenly exercising its practicality during their matriculation and beyond. The study interviewees' abbreviated responses below reflect positive influences of peer-based social capital which occurred during a series of meaningful and shared interactions.

> Also, I like my gen-ed classes where they would let people of different majors mingle and talk in one class. Because it opened perspectives and I like how the teachers would sort of encourage the classes to talk. It's kind of cool to see everyone's experiences, and just have class where everyone can be a little more open. (Johnathan)
>
> I think another informal group that I was part of was actually in one of my lecture classes. It was a gen-ed, I think it was bio. I had a little friend group in there as well; some that I had other gen-eds with, and that also just satisfied socially. We always did homework together, always hung out outside of class together, and always did things together. (Andre)

Plenty, study groups to begin with, like almost anyone I had class with and on a friend level, created a study group together, workout groups, and mental health associations. I think a spiritual outreach group, which was pretty organic. I didn't really create it, it kind of created itself. (Antwon)

I didn't really engage with too many communities at UofL, I guess that would be formal, informal would be more of just my little social network that I created, of students as we went through this program. But for me, my friend started this program, I want to say a semester before me. And so, as a result she could kind of guide me on what the pitfalls were, going into these classes, as well as some of the challenges that she faced. (Marcus)

I think I bonded with a lot of the people who were in my scholarship program. And I think that helped me to reinforce the discipline, time management skills, and those skills that helped me be successful in college. The main two friends I developed through the program ended up being my roommates for junior and senior year. (Ahkeem)

And then to think about my own perspectives and just to be mindful of the people around me; not to be biased. But to know that if someone is doing this; it's kind of affected by their culture. That was kind of something beneficial to help me get rid of those judgmental issues I had before, not to judge, but to look to understand. (Donte)

The above excerpts from interviewees' responses reveal a commonly known understanding that classrooms across college campuses provide key opportunities for students to foster organic relationships with likeminded individuals, as well as with

collegians from diverse backgrounds. It was enlightening to learn about the range of

support that classmates provided to one another, and how authentic connections they

formed would occasionally extend beyond the classroom. Their revelations on the

multiple positive effects of social interactions included mutual support, validation,

academic collaboration, and expansion of world views which reinforces the need for

matriculants to conceptually understand social capital and to proactively become adept at

maximizing its benefits.

Another implication involves providing ongoing workshops and symposia to

ensure all faculty members promote equitable aspects of social capital and its role in

developing lasting impressions which college students acquire from engagement with

professors and through their classroom dynamics. The range of encounters expressed by

this study's participants highlighted certain equitable experiences along with racially

adverse incidents which should be rigorously prohibited and eradicated. This can be

achieved by conducting campus-wide surveys, cultural training with policy enforcement,

as well as with institutional and system-wide change.

> And then there was this one class, I think it's communications in particular, where
>
> I'm not bad at it; but there should have been no reason why I was struggling with
>
> that course. I did not feel like I belonged, and I did not feel like I belonged with
>
> the students. I didn't feel like the professor liked me. (Reginald)
>
> I was the only Black person in any of my professional classes. So it was really
>
> important that I felt welcomed and felt like the space was meant for me and that I
>
> could be supported and just feel comfortable overall. This professor would say
>
> some off the wall kind of things sometimes. (Andre)

Like, just because you're Black and you're in a PWI, it's almost like the PWI is reaching out to see how you feel about the situation, even if you would usually be the person that doesn't speak on it. I mean I'd rather have my own opinion on the situation and just keep it to myself, rather than having to share it through papers or whatever. (Johnathan)

That was a good thing how the White teacher could talk about it and raise the awareness about health disparities; so that I can value all races beyond him just talking about his own race. (Donte)

I think like I said when my grandfather was passing away, I really needed understanding from my instructor because I did sign up for that course. But my instructors put me in a position where they would let me complete my responsibilities, while also being able to tend to the needs that I had. (Marcus)

I was in one of my professor's intro to LGBTQ studies course when we had anti-queer pamphlets with controversial rhetoric delivered to our class. And my classmate behind me who was a straight woman from Africa, she just went off on the guy. (Keon)

Some of my first biology teachers were telling us how you gotta' study different in college. They were basically weeding out all the stuff that you had to forget from high school. So the professors would basically tell you how to pass their classes before you did it. (Johnathan)

I actually got a lot out of the last four courses. Even with interacting with the professors one on one. Like one of my leadership courses actually resonated with me, and actually trickled into my day job. And then my humanities course was

giving me a whole perspective on how to interact and deal with people.

(Reginald)

The above perspectives derived from study participants' in-class experiences and interactions with faculty not only reveal the academic climate, but also the social contexts and rules of engagement which professors are charged with creating and sustaining. While higher education institutions must enact and enforce standards on equitable classroom protocols, it is actually the hidden curriculum that dictates what ultimately occurs within the rooms which affects prime experiences of all collegiate learners. Although it was refreshing to note the positive encounters interviewees earnestly recalled, it was rather concerning that underrepresented students are yet confronted with chasms regarding belongingness, while absorbing racial microaggressions through subtle slights and being required in courses to vocalize or express feedback on what is considered as the Black issues of the day. Such complicated-ness of classroom and curricula dynamics confirms a necessity that institutional policies and actual practices become amenable toward mandating wholesome in-class experiences for all marginalized students, and particularly for first-generation African American men. Perhaps there should be opt-in or opt-out alternatives without any negative consequences toward anyone that chooses either approach.

Higher education staff members such as program coordinators, recognized student organization advisors, professors and security personnel could benefit from concentrated training on social capital, diversity and equity. The subject matter should focus primarily on prevention with not being a party to racially demeaning interactions and clarifying the mildly discernible, as well as blatant forms of racial discrimination and racism. Four

study participants below recalled indelible race-based experiences which occurred during pursuit of their undergraduate studies.

> I do know at times there were things going on in society that might have bled down onto campus, and in those times where we as Black students came together for certain stuff that might've happened on campus or as a sign of solidarity for stuff that was happening everywhere else. (Jamal)

> Just remembering that I was the only Black person within the program. Nearly everyone else was like, "Oh I got the school that I asked for - my school's principal had emailed this person and they made sure they put me at their school." And the school that I was assigned to…was the school that I didn't want and then I think another school that was way out on the east side. (Andre)

> A campus police officer saw me and my friend walking to my car from the library. And he told us that the reason he did all of that is because there have been criminals stealing people's stuff from their cars. Basically he kind of profiled us, and he didn't really listen to our story. (Johnathan)

> I ended up not getting the position, and given the fact that I had spent a year in this organization. I had all the statistics, deliverables, and all the metrics across the board. I was disappointed in the fact that the advisor didn't really advocate for me as much as I think they should have. That's a point where I felt like I just really didn't belong and the experience I just described would be something I would consider as racist. (Ahkeem)

In an era filled with ongoing policy and legislative actions to aggressively reverse remedies designed to address or counter centuries-old and even present day

discrimination and racist practices; these recent accounts reflect the burdensome lived experiences of first-generation African American collegiate men. Such emotionally fatiguing occurrences mirror the everyday scenarios which students of color shockingly endure while traversing campuses of PWI's with the mountainous hope of completing their college degree in a space free of disenfranchisement and constant psychological assaults.

During the qualitative interviews, most of the study participants expressed a series of positive statements about their academic advising experiences and interactions. Nonetheless, ongoing feedback surveys should be utilized to increase the impact regarding UofL's current advising strategies and approaches. Two interviewees expressed similar concerns revealing insight on ways to enhance effectiveness and improve perceptions of existing UofL advising practices.

> I honestly feel like my academic advisors could've did a better job with helping
> me get scheduled. My advisors were more so just giving me the classes I had to
> take; and sort of just say, "You can take this, this and this." They didn't really
> morph to what I needed. (Johnathan)
> Just given the fact that, a lot of times it would just be, "We have the flight plans,
> I'm sure you're familiar with it." But you go into those meetings and it'll be like,
> "Okay I have your flight plan pulled up, looks like you need to take this class, this
> class, this class." (Ahkeem)

These authentic statements from two study participants demonstrate a data-informed need to incorporate personalized dialogue and customization within each academic advising interaction. This would make it more unlikely to appear that a superficial cookie cutter

approach is being used during advising sessions. The implication involves UofL fostering innovative ways for advisors to administer essential course information and degree requirements, while also executing an individualized approach. If more advisors had student affairs degrees, advising dynamics would likely be more personal and developmental. This enhancement could enable first-generation collegiate Black men to collectively feel their unique advising needs are earnestly being met without perceiving advisors are routinely checking off boxes to generic talking points from a standardized script.

To accentuate and promote the value of social capital, intensive training and interactive workshops on the benefits of social networks should be provided to UofL professors, staff members, and counselors who provide academic guidance and clinical therapies. Findings from interviews with the first-generation African American men in this study conveyed that positive mentoring influences were administered by individuals serving in the aforementioned roles. Imparting knowledge on social capital throughout the university among employees who frequently interact with students will achieve large-scale dissemination of practical insights. It could also result in acceleration of building meaningful bonds which can ultimately improve rates of retention and graduation. Implementing this practice is likely to systematically increase levels of belongingness and institutional trust among UofL's population of first-generation Black men. The study participants' responses below involving aspects of social capital reflect major navigational influences and positive outcomes from direct and indirect academic mentoring.

I had various biology teachers that would check in. In my senior year, I started

going to counseling sessions and my counselor, he also played a big part. Just

getting more in tune with my emotions and learning how to manage stress better.

(Ahkeem)

I would also say my advisor as she helped me a lot, for real. She connected me

with another lady. So, if I ever needed a syllabus or books, she'd tell me to go to

her. (Donte)

Yeah I definitely got some people. In the CONECT mentoring program, it was

one of the lead advisors. She kind of was like a mom in a way. She actually

played a big role into me getting back in school this last time to finish up. (Jamal)

I really leaned on my academic advisor. She was extremely helpful the entire

time. She guided me on the courses I needed to take and how heavy the workload

would be. (Reginald)

Based upon the interviewees' responses, it is crucial that professors, advisors and

counselors consistently hold their capacity to directly influence academic outcomes of

collegians in the highest regard. Faculty members fulfill a unique role in being able to

make or break their students' resolve toward persisting to complete a post-secondary

degree. The same is true for academic advisors by taking a vested interest in their

advisees overall success, especially in terms of helping them gain access to tangible

resources such as textbooks, study guides, and other beneficial learning aids. Clinical

counselors can also be profoundly impactful upon matriculants, especially by promoting

destigmatization of therapeutic approaches to maximize the emotional intelligence and

degree attainment of underserved students. The onus is upon institutions of higher

learning and all student success stakeholders to guide and support collegians in finding the balance between independence and interdependence. This process involves implementation of multiple approaches to foster the development of social capital among first-generation African American men.

Participants of this study also mentioned elements of support received from parent/s guardian/s, and certain family members involving monetary assistance, guidance, as well as inspiration which positively contributed to their degree completion. Implications to promote greater engagement from parents, guardians and family members of first-generation collegiate Black men and the post-secondary institution include budgetary allocations toward long-term initiatives to increase retention and graduation rates among this student population. Impactful efforts could involve parental programming during first-year orientation sessions, hosting a parents and family day occurring each semester with online streaming access, and creating a parent/guardian monthly e-newsletter with practical tips on supporting college students.

UofL's strategic outreach and support to parents and guardians can also involve encouraging their pursuit and completion of bachelor's, as well as associates degrees and attainment of trade certifications or pursuit of GED credentials, as applicable. Programmatic efforts of this nature could be useful in fostering a college-going culture among family members of first-generation collegians. Execution of these practices may also produce gains in admission outcomes for non-traditional students, resulting in a more educated populace across Kentucky and beyond. Achieving these possibilities could be a seamless process, especially if employers of the parents or guardians offer tuition assistance benefits, or if any prospective enrollees are also eligible for Pell grant funding.

Regarding higher education administrators and student affairs leaders, the findings from this research study provide evidence-based justifications to implement policies and practices promoting the value of social capital to the benefit of college students and the institution. Doing so is likely to enhance the impact of collegians' peer relationships, advance the influence of mentoring and its academic benefits, as well as heighten levels of belongingness and mutual trust particularly among first-generation African American men. All nine interviewees elaborated on multiple aspects of social capital during the qualitative interviews, inducing the above mentioned themes from their responses to the open-ended questions and sub-questions. These data can also be a catalyst for allocating additional institutional funds to lessen disparities which persist for marginalized students across all spectrums. Taking such actions can eliminate appearances of complacency or apathy and could dispel perceptions that students of color are being exploited through social pandering and diversity ploys without key provisions of sizeable investments to permanently resolve pervasive educational inequalities.

Conscientious leaders should conduct forensic analyses through ongoing campus-wide surveys, assessments and evaluations to gauge needs, as well as improve the institutional climate and experiences of under-represented students, especially for first-generation Black men. Also, continually tracking and heightening the effectiveness of support programs will enable additional resources to be allocated and dispersed to generate and sustain upward trends in retention and graduation of this historically under-supported student population.

A national annual conference on Black collegiate men and social capital can be held where evidence-based practices, policies and programs are strategically shared with

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all post-secondary stakeholders for implementation upon returning to their respective institutions. Organizational performance benchmarks in the interest of this student segment can be implemented at the federal and state levels which would compel colleges and universities to impact these students and the numbers to qualify for continuous funding. This outcomes-based approach could likely resolve any disservice of enrolling capable first-generation students without provisions of the essential supports to ensure, sustain and improve their degree success. These achievable results from the above implications could have exponential effects toward dismantling academic underachievement and ongoing societal disenfranchisement.

Semesterly experiential surveys, as well as a reporting system with a dedicated office where racial incidents experienced by Black men and any student for that matter could be tracked and addressed. Such actions would create a safe space and provide confidential sources where disparaging incidents can be reported and investigated for effective and timely resolutions. This would serve as staunch and committed efforts toward eliminating the all-too-common micro- and macro-aggressions customarily imposed upon Black collegiate men. A state of the campus culture town hall discussion could also be facilitated each semester where difficult conversations are had, followed up with a plan of action and discussions to ultimately make UofL's entire campus a place of belonging, acceptance and validation for every current and future Cardinal student.

To foster realities of representation for, and within Black collegiate men, post-secondary institutions should and must recruit, hire, retain and consistently promote men of color to ensure first-generation African American men consistently see individuals who look like them within the various ranks of faculty, staff, administrators and security

personnel. Such an approach can amass a cadre of prospective mentors and offer real-life examples of institutional commitments to advance the holistic success of this student population.

Recommendations for Future Research

To further extend the topical themes and scope of this qualitative dissertation involving exploration of social capital, the prospective sample population of future research studies could include second- or third-generation college graduates, including African American women, and individuals among the Latina/o population or additional demographic characteristics and identity attributes. Comparisons and contrasts could be made amongst and between different student populations to determine how to best support their specific academic and holistic development towards retention and degree completion. Interviewees of future studies could also consist of college students who stopped-out during their matriculation, with the researcher/s ascertaining if an absence of social interactions or a lack of network resources influenced any leaving decisions and attrition outcomes. Data from such research studies could lead to standardizing essential support needed for stop-outs and may provide pathways of college re-entry, as well as potentially reduce attrition levels and improve rates of degree completion.

An additional research study could be conducted to determine whether aspects of social capital and academic outcomes differ or vary among collegians who are commuters living off- campus, versus those who live on-campus within residence halls. Specifically, researchers could conduct qualitative or quantitative studies to examine the influence or impact of social capital upon academic achievement, persistence, retention and graduation of first-generation African American men who live on- versus off-

campus. This study's findings could inform the design of programmatic supports to aid college students in proactive development of social skills and in building collaborative dynamics relevant to academic outcomes.

Another research study could focus more specifically on the positive or negative memories derived from social network interactions, and how any prominent memories may have favorably or unfavorably influenced a college student's individual academic decision-making regarding persistence and bachelor's degree completion. The nature of such inquiries could determine how specific recollections derived from social capital may affect levels of academic achievement within a post-secondary context, and prompt initiation of proactive supports.

This phenomenological study focused on exploring lived experiences of research participants using qualitative open-ended interviews; however, future research could utilize a quantitative approach within the context of a mixed-method study or a strictly survey-based longitudinal approach conducted annually across each year of the undergraduates' experience. Incorporating these characteristics and parameters within a study could detect if social capital becomes more relevant and beneficial to collegians in the latter years of their matriculation than the former years. There could also be academic studies conducted with traditional verses non-traditional students to highlight and contrast any identifiable differences in the function of social capital among those particular students. Potential findings from these academic research studies could result in customizing relevant programmatic resources to enhance students' grasp and development of social capital, as well as their overall college experiences, belongingness and levels of degree attainment.

Given certain participants' responses in this study, future research could be conducted to determine the influence or impact of the COVID pandemic on social interactions and to confirm whether or how the pandemic may have hindered (in any way) the academic achievement of various college student populations. Focus groups could also be used to generate more in-depth responses and permit deeper analyses of additional phenomena which may be openly discussed. Implementing these nuanced approaches can potentially broaden the field of academic research on social capital, and may equip higher education stakeholders with insightful data to transform holistic experiences and maximize the graduation rates of all college student populations.

Concluding Words of Participants

Towards the end of each open-ended interview, eight out of the nine study participants readily shared closing reflections concerning their individual undergraduate experiences at UofL.

Ahkeem

I would say a major thing would be, and this is kind of connected with the last answer I just gave, making sure to be connected with people. And I think that looking back on the experiences, a lot of times the classes are the easiest part, which may sound non-conventional. A lot of the times everything else you have going on outside of class that gets in the way, but just staying focused, staying disciplined, keeping your eye on the ball and focusing on the goal rather than like, "oh there's this party I need to go to." Or like, "oh there's this basketball game I want to go to." Just knowing how to manage your time, I think is the best takeaway from college. Just because there's even such a shift from high school,

when teachers would say, "oh you have this assignment due, or you have that assignment due." But college is more so like, everything is on you. It's on you to look at the syllabus. It's on you to know your due dates for this or be working on this project - giving yourself enough time to work on it and edit it, even the same thing with writing papers. It's a lot of self-discipline and I feel like if you have that, you can achieve the goal at the end, whether that be bachelor's, master's, Ph.D., whatever.

Andre

I don't think I have any additional information that I wanted to add.

Antwon

I would say make it easier on student living if possible, like that was a struggle that I had, the student housing, the whole student living situation. There should be greater understanding given to students, not their parents, before they come to college. I just think the communication of available living areas or the exposures to the different living areas and ways of life in Louisville, outside of just being in the dorm. Because it wasn't until my junior year that I knew we had apartment complexes 2, 3 blocks over and really all the way down as far as you could go. I thought that one block we were on was really campus, like we had Card Towne. I didn't know that up the street we had the Marshall or we had, I forget what it is. I'm trying to think of what it's called - Trifecta is what it's called. When I would do my room selections, they wouldn't mention them. They would mention the other dorms, but unless you mentioned the offsite living situation, they didn't really bring it up to you. It shouldn't be so monetarily oriented. Because living off

campus, it allowed me to become a better student, just having that little get away and not feeling so trapped.

Donte

I would say for the incoming students, especially the ones who share the same identity as me, I would advise them, when they get a chance, just to participate in activities. Make some connections, and just look for outside sources because it's very important. I tried to, but I couldn't because I was so busy. If they get a chance, please, they have to connect, because this will be a very good source of benefits which will come out of that. So. please if you can, just do it.

Jamal

If anything, I would just say to make our experiences better. A lot of times, a lot of people don't know what's going on on-campus. Yeah they might send an email, but a lot of times, a lot of things get lost because they need to find a new way to get in touch with people, get in touch with students. A lot of times, there's stuff that happens now that since I'm an alum, they send a ton of stuff - emails and things get lost in that email, like events that I could go to, and I'd be like, "dang, when was this?" But I see pictures and stuff, and I'm like, "was that the only place y'all put it was in certain emails and stuff?" So I think it's better ways to communicate with people of color on campus, and that's pretty much my biggest thing, just better ways to communicate.

Johnathan

I'd say they (UofL) were always helpful and they always did what they could to make sure that I had the best chance to succeed and graduate. Well I wouldn't say

succeed; I'd say graduate at least. And overall it was still like a fun time. But yeah, definitely I want you to put in there. Louisville definitely wanted to see all of its students succeed, that's one thing I will give to Louisville. Not succeed, when I say succeed, maybe not in life cause' of course they don't care about that, but they at least want to see you graduate from Louisville.

Keon

With it being not so traditional at UofL, I had mentioned about me wishing I was there more often. I think my overall issue with UofL, and this is something that I know is never gonna' change. I know other people have the same qualms about it; focusing so much on athletics at the expense of other buildings, other departments. The money that athletics brings in can be used for improving quality of life in buildings, in dorms as opposed to, "What's the next field we can buy for this sporting event for this, whatever?" But we are a college sport town, so I know it's not gonna' change. It's just wishing that it would. And that's honestly pretty much like my only gripe. I think I can't complain much about my time at UofL, other than wishing that I could change the timeline that I was there.

Marcus

I had a good experience; I had an excellent experience. I would say that I was very thankful that that's where I went to school. The most challenging part was for my community course and things like that, you'd have to go out and get your own clinical assignments. I was really thankful and I thought the program was great and gave me what I needed. What I will say is the most difficult thing was finding clinical assignments. I want to say the capstone class at the very end;

you're supposed to hit week one, ground running. You're supposed to have a clinical assignment and start getting your hours the very first week. That is tough to do if you are on the road or a student who maybe doesn't have those connections. And I can see that being a difficulty in finishing this program. So I would encourage them to broaden their network, if you have students like me who are coming from outside the commonwealth of Kentucky. Like for this particular class you had to complete 100 hours of community nursing practice. They had a whole list of places within Louisville where you could get your hours. But at the time, I was in Washington and in Missouri. I was between multiple places. So it's like, what about me? What if I'm a first-generation kid who's actually like 19 or 20 years old and I'm living in some other random places? It's just there are a lot of holes in this program that weren't exposed, because I filled them. So, I think there's some definite room for improvement, but on the whole, I was very thankful to graduate; I was really thankful for that.

Reginald

My experience with UofL, I like the fact that I know now that UofL is definitely progressive. My first experience from where it was then, to where it is now, you can tell it's definitely a difference, even in the academic advisors, how they handle you. Everything that I went through, even with getting back into UofL has been simple. Like some people kind of hold their breath and everything, I wish I could get back in school. The answers are literally right there in front of you. I even take it a step further; I even told people in Louisville, there are un-housed people out here in Louisville, even if they go to UPS and work overnight, I can

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guarantee you, because they get paid weekly, they'll probably have a place to stay

in about a month and a half. You just have to know about your resources; like

read your resources.

A Researcher's Reflections

This research study provided riveting insights on the lived experiences of nine

first-generation African American men who matriculated on the college campus of an

HWI in the mid-south. While there were indications of progressive improvements

regarding the treatment and support of Black collegiate men, there are also rational

justifications and irrefutable causes for concern. It must be acknowledged that origins of

higher education in America firmly denied enrollment to people of color while stridently

exploiting them as servants and laborers under the inhumane apparatus of chattel slavery

(Wilder, 2013). Although the colonization framework upon which the earliest post-

secondary institutions were formed has been de-popularized, its operational residue is

palpable and still functions - lurking clandestinely as evidenced through injurious

treatment described by Black men who participated in this qualitative study (Dancy et al.,

2018). With various state legislators across the nation enacting regulations to roll back

the progress towards racial parity, the permanence of racism continues asserting its

unrelenting will to suppress interests of many, while enshrining the interests of but a few

(Bell, 1992).

When posing questions to this study's participants concerning the intersectionality

of Blackness and gender which revealed forms of racial oppression against them, I was

keenly aware of my sensitivities and vulnerabilities, being triggered by memories of my

own personal experiences with racism. I could certainly identify with instances expressed

by the interviewees, describing realities of being ignored or invisible to also being hypervisible, surveilled, profiled and even detained. Conducting this study has heightened my level of empathy towards Black matriculants, Black collegiate men, and even Black men in general. While it was encouraging to learn of the resilience these nine baccalaureate graduates demonstrated to earn their degrees, my optimism about the future for African American collegiate men is soberly measured and guarded. Given the accounts where certain professors and staff members were complicit in mistreating the participants very likely due to race, it is this hidden curriculum functioning within and outside of classrooms which foments and recycles daunting challenges for African American college men (Kegan, 1995; Tinto, 2006).

Cultivation of social capital and academic success of collegiate Black men may be deemed as opposition to collective interests of the White establishment - else PWI's ceaseless marginal statistics on low retention and abysmal graduation rates would not continue to persist and subsist. This absence of interest convergence could be an inconspicuous catalyst which also drives the notion that if Black men would simply comport and calibrate themselves into being exceptional, the reigning meritocracy will then bestow upon us all the capitalistic wares and honors we have so strenuously earned (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016; Gassam Asare, 2021). The sheer audacity of racism seems to nullify this fallacious promise.

Summary

The findings, analyses, implications and recommendations in this qualitative dissertation materialized through an initial endeavor of unmuting the voices, perspectives and experiences of first-generation African American collegiate men. The theoretical

paradigms which formulated this study involved exploring meaning derived from shared phenomena through self-authorship by investigating perspectives of the sample population with credence given to their narratives differing considerably from predominant viewpoints. The intersectionality of race and gender was also centered in this dissertation study while examining the influence of social capital theory upon bachelor's degree completion at the University of Louisville, a PWI located within the mid-south sector of the United States.

The pre-existing literature involving topical elements of this qualitative dissertation was extended by addressing gaps through inclusion of first-generation African American men as the sample population in this study, along with analyses of institution-specific findings. Individual interviews using 15 open-ended questions were conducted virtually with nine first-generation African American men who successfully completed their bachelor's degrees at UofL within the last three years. An 11-item demographic profile was used to obtain the participants' differing characteristics. There were three core research questions which were answered and data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed resulting in emergence of six salient themes which included: (a) resourceful college relationships, (b) co-navigators of academic success, (c) network benefits, (d) sense of belonging, (e) mutual trust, and (d) race-centric encounters.

Dismal performance metrics alone substantiate and echo a consistent need to improve degree completion rates of first-generation Black men. Implications from this research study compel all collegiate stakeholders, post-secondary leaders, higher education policymakers, and practitioners to allocate immediate funding resources to

foster social capital and eradicate the systemic retention and graduation disparities among

first-generation African American men.

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community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education 8*(1), 69-91.

Young, A., Johnson, G., Hawthorne, M., & Pugh, J. (2011). Cultural predictors of academic motivation and achievement: A self-deterministic approach. *College Student Journal, 45*(1), 151-163.

Zeidner, M., Matthews, G., & Roberts, R. D. (2009). *What we know about emotional intelligence: How it affects learning, work, relationships, and our mental health.* MIT Press.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1—What motivated or prompted your decision to attend the University of Louisville?

2—What positive relationships did you form with peers or classmates that contributed to your success? Describe the/those relationship/s and share ways a meaningful difference was made in your college experience.

      Potential sub question: What student groups or organizations (if any) were you involved

      in, and how did this impact your college experience?

3—Who are people who helped you navigate your college pathway, and what role did they play in supporting your academic and personal success?

      Sub question prompt: Peers, family, coach, advisor, faculty, administrator,

      supervisor, clergy, etc.

4—What are one or two memorable challenges you encountered while pursuing your degree, and how did you get through or surpass those challenges?

5—Describe a time when you felt like you most belonged at the University of Louisville.

6—Share a story or experience where you felt like you least belonged at the University of Louisville.

7—What experience/s (if any) did you have with racism at the University of Louisville? Who supported you best during that/those time/s? Please share an example of your experience.

8—Describe an instance (if any) where mutual trust was a part of interactions with a person or group that played a positive role in your undergraduate experience.

9—What individuals would you say were most influential with you completing your college degree, and how was that influence demonstrated? or Who (if anyone) would you say provided the most motivation or inspiration to complete your bachelor's degree, and how did that occur?

10—What benefits (if any) did you receive due to being involved within a formal or informal group during your University of Louisville undergraduate experience?

11—What individuals or organizations (if any) did you form connections with at the University of Louisville?

12—From where (or from whom) did you get the most information or knowledge on navigating the path through college?

13—How would you summarize your overall college experience at the University of Louisville?

14—Based on your experiences at UofL, what advice would you give to a new student who shares your identity?

15—I'm interested in anything else you'd like to share about your experience at UofL.

Appendix B: Demographic Profile

Name:

_____

Pseudonym:

_____

Current age:

_____

Race / ethnicity (please note all that apply):

_____

Academic major:

_____

Year first entered college:

_____

Year bachelor's degree completed:

_____

Full-time, part-time student, or enrolled as both:

_____

Student organization/s:

_____

Highest grade parents/guardians completed:

_____

Highest grade sibling/s completed:

_____

Appendix C: Email to Prospective Participants

Hello,

My name is Joe Goodman, and I'm a doctoral candidate at the University of Louisville's College of Education in the Educational Counseling and Psychology Department. I'm contacting you to confirm your interest to be a participant in my research study for partial fulfillment of my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree.

The purpose of my study is to explore aspects of social capital and its influence on degree completion of first-generation African American men at the University of Louisville. The goal is to interview 8 African American men who earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Louisville within the last three years.

Your participation in the approx. 60 minutes interview will result in receiving a $20 Amazon gift card. At a later date, after you review your transcribed confidential interview, you'll also receive another $20 Amazon gift card.

Social capital is an emerging topic in higher education and what's learned about your experiences could be of value to current and future students at the University of Louisville. If you're interested in participating within this study, please contact me as soon as possible at jmgood06@louisville.edu or at (502)221-5033.

Given the timeline to complete the study, it's requested you respond to this email by August 21, 2023.

With gratitude,

Joseph Goodman | Doctoral Candidate
College of Education & Human Development | University of Louisville

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF
LOUISVILLE

DATE:	September 11, 2023
TO:	Amy S Hirschy, Ph.D.
FROM:	The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board 300 E. Market Street, Suite 380 Louisville, KY 40202
IRB NUMBER:	23.0589
STUDY TITLE:	**A Qualitative Exploration of Social Capital and Its Influence on Baccalaureate** **Degree Completion of First-Generation African American Men at the University of Louisville**
REFERENCE #:	769787
CONTACT:	Christy LaDuke 852-2541 clpepp01@louisville.edu

This study now has final IRB approval from 09/11/2023 through 09/10/2026.

Expedited Approval: Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies
 This study has been granted a waiver of written documentation of consent (waiver of signed consent).

Documents reviewed and approved:

Form Name		Version	Outcome
IRB Study Application		Version 1.1	Approved
Title	**Version #**	**Version Date**	**Outcome**
Clean Version...Consent Preamble 09.02.23	Version 1.0	09/02/2023	Approved
Clean Version...Participant Email 09.02.23	Version 1.0	09/02/2023	Approved
Clean Version...IRB Protocol 09.02.23	Version 1.0	09/02/2023	
Interview Questionnaire	Version 1.0	09/02/2023	

Stamped Approved Documents

IRB policy requires that investigators use the IRB stamped approved version of informed consents, assents, and other materials given to research participants. The IRB applies an approval stamp to the top right hand corner of the document. Stamped documents are noted with "approved" in the table above. For instructions on locating the IRB stamped documents in IRIS visit:
https://louisville.app.box.com/s/oh7a7ccyjlsyqxa1goibbgf3rx5jle8v.

Continuation Requirements

- **Your study has been set with a three-year expiration date.** If you complete your study prior to the expiration date, you are required to submit a study closure amendment.
- You are responsible for submitting a continuation request approximately 30 days prior to the expiration date of your research study. If a study lapse occurs, this is considered noncompliance and may prompt a HSPPO audit.
- Human Participants & HIPAA Research training are required for all study personnel. It is the responsibility of the investigator to ensure that all study personnel maintain current Human Participants & HIPAA Research training while the study is ongoing

Study Site Approval

Permission from the institution or organization where this research will be conducted **must** be obtained before the research can begin (e.g., UofL Health, Norton Healthcare, Jefferson County Public Schools, etc.).

Amendments (Making Changes to the Study)

Prior to making changes to the study, the investigator must submit an amendment to the IRB and receive approval. If the change is being made to ensure the immediate safety and welfare of the participants, refer to the amendments link above for more information.

Reportable Events

The investigator is responsible for reporting certain study events to the IRB within 5 working days. Refer to the reportable events page on the HSPP Website.

In addition, you are required to follow all University of Louisville policies and procedures related to conducting human subjects research, including protecting research data and providing payments to participants. For more information visit: Human Subjects Protection Program Policies.

The committee will be advised of this action.

Thank you,

Melissa Evans Andris, PhD, Vice Chair
Social/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board
We value your feedback; let us know how we are doing:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CCLHXRP

Joseph Goodman, PhD
globalsuccesslifestyle@gmail.com
(502)221-5033

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Doctor of Philosophy Degree | Counseling & College Student Personnel
University of Louisville   2024

Master of Education Degree | Counseling & College Student Personnel
University of Louisville   2013

Master of Public Affairs Degree | Public Management
Indiana University Northwest   2010

Bachelor of Arts Degree | Business Management
Chicago State University   2007

CAREER SUMMARY

12 Years of working on diverse teams & effectively fostering strategic collaborations
12 Years of experience with P-20 academic data collection & systems management
12 Years of progressive curriculum design & co-curricular programming experience
12 Years of transformative leadership implementing recruitment & retention initiatives
12 Years of supporting the academic success & engagement of underserved students
10 Years of effective higher education budgeting & fiscal management experience
10 Years of collaborations with faculty, educators & academic administrators

MILITARY SERVICE

Communications Specialist | Sergeant
United States National Guard   1 Year

Electronics Material Specialist | Sergeant
United States Anny   6 Years

Secret Security Clearance | Recipient
U.S. Department of Defense   10 Years

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Associate Dean | Outreach & Recruitment   2018
El Centro College

- Exhibited impactful leadership in overseeing the Sprint to the Promise Phone Campaign resulting in collaborative success of enrolling 433 Dallas County Promise Scholars
- Successfully managed budgets of designated departments & assisted with development & enhancement of web page content for Outreach & Recruitment & Testing units
- Collaborated with various department Deans, Directors, Coordinators & Staff members to achieve enrollment goals, student onboarding & retention-focused outcomes
- Facilitated & coordinated implementation of Workforce Training Program (WIOA) to enroll under-employed & unemployed Dallas residents in degree & certificate programs
- Participated in college fairs sponsored by municipal, community & corporate partners, as well as school districts to recruit prospective students & future college graduates
- Directed & orchestrated one-on-one & core leadership team meetings to clarify expectations, desired outcomes & to formulate departmental strategies & priorities
- Posted full-time & part-time positions for the purposes of identifying, screening & selection of qualified candidates to fulfill critical roles & responsibilities
- Conducted presentations during peak registration periods to inform & acclimate incoming students on their rights & responsibilities, supportive services & institutional policies
- Oversaw & assisted with onboarding of new employees & administered climate surveys to identify opportunities for success coaching & professional development of staff

Director | Student Support Services   2015 – 18
Kentucky State University

- Demonstrated leadership skills to achieve 100% across five core benchmark areas on the federal Department of Education's Annual Performance Report for two consecutive years
- Exhibited prudent fiscal management towards segmented budget of 1.2 million dollars & applied evidence-based practices & effective personnel coaching techniques
- Built authentic & mutually beneficial relationships with internal staff, team units, intra & inter-divisional partners, community collaborators & other external constituents
- Implemented systematic & technological processes to heighten recruitment, retention, engagement, persistence & graduation among a diverse population of student achievers
- Fostered & promoted a culture of high expectations while providing resources & proactive support necessary for staff & students to achieve 100% of goal attainment
- Utilized fiscal prudence with budget allocations & ensured monetary expenditures were aligned with organizational priorities, programmatic policies & long term objectives
- Sustained strategic alliances with institutional allies including Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid Office, New Student Orientation Staff & other campus units
- Heightened use of proprietary databases to track academic outcomes & student involvement while increasing outreach & delivery of retention-based support services
- Consistently participated in regional & national conferences to remain abreast of relevant best practices, as well as assessment & evaluation tools for continuous improvement
- Ensured programmatic policies were applied efficiently, maintaining a consistent track record of compliance with institutional guidelines & with state & federal regulations
- Served as an engaged member of the Operation Graduation Team implementing interventions & worked strategically to effectively resolve presidential complaints

Lead College Coach | Federal TRiO | GO College Program 2013 – 15
University of Louisville

- Intently fulfilled 100% college admission expectation to maximize scholastic success & quality of life outcomes while systematically enhancing school district metrics
- Sustained 100% benchmark achievement in yearly program enrollment & participation across four cohorts of students for transformative outcomes & longitudinal success
- Cohesively engaged post-secondary institutions, admissions officers, administrators, high school counselors & community partners to improve enrollment management outcomes
- Provided influential leadership with an innovative model of success for academic counselors to emulate & increase students' persistence
- Effectively imparted social capital & fostered life skills development, perpetual learning, cultural dexterity & self-directed interdependence to favorably impact diploma attainment rates & successful completion of post-secondary aspirations
- Skillfully coordinated multi-subject tutoring sessions, student interventions & meaningful connections with instructional mentoring & authentic peer-based interactions
- Diligently provided proactive success coaching, college & career preparation resources & strategic programming to first-generation / underrepresented high school students
- Facilitated interactive instruction to promote college & career readiness, heighten standardized test achievement & scholarship eligibility for seamless access & degree completion at best-fit post-secondary institutions

Program Coordinator | African American Male Initiative 2010 – 13
University of Louisville

- Implemented effective recruitment strategies to achieve 100% participation benchmark
- Effectively managed department budget & strategically coordinated programming & developmental resources to heighten retention outcomes
- Gauged academic achievement of under-served students & recommended remediation
- Developed customized model to identify & address inhibitors to educational attainment
- Assembled diverse task force of faculty, staff & students for institution-wide impact
- Performed role of administrator & provided strategic oversight to campus constituents
- Implemented outreach initiatives to increase involvement & community engagement
- Advocated for systematic leadership development of various student segments
- Compiled empirical qualitative & quantitative data to enhance graduation rates
- Served as Advisor & Mentor supporting students in their admission to graduate school

Retention Graduate Assistant 2009 – 10
Indiana University

- Creatively engaged prospects to increase bridge-to-college program enrollment by 300%
- Contributed strategic efforts toward increasing dean's list honorees by 100%
- Effectively generated 50% improvement in active membership participation
- Utilized technology resources to improve weekly meeting attendance by 50%

INTERNSHIPS

School of Medicine (PhD) Intern   2015 – 18
University of Louisville
- Co-developed formal preparation pathways into medical school for under-served students
- Effectively facilitated collaborative networks among diversity/admissions professionals
- Provided intrusive support to undergraduate students pursuing medical/health careers

College of Arts & Sciences (PhD) Research Intern   2012 – 16
University of Louisville
- Assisted with data analysis to enhance academic persistence of underrepresented students
- Secured research participants for qualitative interviews to improve retention outcomes
- Contributed research skills on writing projects of Dr. Derrick Brooms / Retention Scholar

Speed School of Engineering (MEd) Intern   2012 – 13
University of Louisville
- Implemented sustainable strategies to enhance impact of NSBE's engagement & diversity
- Collaborated with engineering students on planning & coordination of signature events
- Assisted with local outreach to cultivate engineering interest & college-going aspirations

Brandeis School of Law (MEd) Intern   2011 – 12
University of Louisville
- Skillfully conveyed admissions information to prospective law students at recruiting fairs
- Successfully coordinated interviews & selection process for the Harlan Scholars Program
- Effectively assisted in planning 10th-year Celebration of Central High School Partnership
- Designed & customized Excel reports to streamline data analysis & tracking processes

Community Engagement (MPA) Intern   2010
Indiana University
- Strategically promoted main priorities of the Center for Urban & Regional Excellence
- Interfaced with a project team on a proposal to promote community health awareness
- Assisted with hosting an urban regional forum to activate indigenous leadership
- Co-presented at a national conference hosted by the Environmental Protection Agency

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor | Upward Bound, Science/ACT Prep/Financial Literacy
University of Louisville – Louisville, KY   2012

Instructor | GO College Leadership Scholars, Academics/Life Skills Enrichment
University of Louisville – Louisville, KY   2011

Instructor | Upward Bound, Science/Financial Literacy/Leadership
University of Louisville – Louisville, KY   2011

Instructor | Upward Bound, Health Science/Basic Life Skills
Purdue University – Hammond/West Lafayette, IN   2006 – 07

Educator | 5th-9th Grades, Social Studies/Science/Math/Business
Ambassador Academy – Gary, IN   2005 – 06

TEACHING EXPERIENCE cont.
Visiting Instructor | BUSN 105, Principles of Management
Ivy Tech Community College – Gary, IN   2001

Visiting Instructor | BUSN 203, Business Development
Ivy Tech Community College – Gary, IN   2001

PUBLICATIONS
Brooms, D. R., & Goodman, J. M. (2019). Bonding beyond the university: Experiences of Black males on a sojourn to Atlanta. *Journal of African American Males in Education. 10*(1), 1-19.

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

Anthony, M. D., Skerritt, L., & Goodman, J. M. (2012). The African American male initiative at the University of Louisville. *Kentucky Journal of Higher Education Policy and Practice.* Vol. 1: Issue 2, Article 6. http://uknowledge.uky.edu/kjhepp/vol1/iss2/6.

PRESENTATIONS
Goodman, J. M. (August 2018). *Highlights of Student Success 2017-18 Accomplishments.* Student Success & Enrollment Management Division Meeting. Dallas, TX.

Goodman, J. M., & Vasquez, P. (July 2018). *Dallas County Promise Scholars at El Centro College.* Monthly Presidential Cabinet Meeting. Dallas, TX.

Goodman, J. M. (September 2017). *Succeeding in college: From start to finish.* Louisville Male Traditional High School College Bound Night. Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M. (September 2017). *Expressions to ignite academic excellence.* Keynote Address at the University of Louisville Brother 2 Brother Fall 2017 Retreat. Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M., Milton, W., Thomas, M., & Wheeler, E. (November 2016). *Life after KSU: Graduate school 101.* Kentucky State University. Frankfort, KY.

Goodman, J. M. (November 2016). *Designing effective student support programs.* Kentucky Association of Blacks in Higher Education Regional Meeting. Frankfort, KY.

Goodman, J. M., Ford, J., & Maxwell, M. (September 2016). *What makes it tick: Building team synergy in a college success unit.* Council for Opportunity in Education National Conference. San Diego, CA.

Goodman, J. M., & Ford, J. (July 2016). *Implementing an institution-wide student advising strategy.* NACADA Summer Institute. Norfolk, VA.

Goodman, J. M. (July 2016). Master of Ceremonies, *Parent information luncheon for first-year students' orientation.* Kentucky State University. Frankfort, KY.

PRESENTATIONS cont.

Goodman, J. M. (June 2016). Moderator, *Reflections on supportive experiences of K-State alums during matriculation.* CPE Summer Conference. Kentucky State University. Frankfort, KY.

Goodman, J. M. (April 2016). *The mission & benefits of the student support services program.* First-Year University Experience Course at Kentucky State University. Frankfort, KY.

Goodman, J. M., & Keith, R. (April 2016). *Insights on elements of manhood & masculinity.* Annual Men's Conference Panel Discussion at Kentucky State University. Frankfort, KY.

Goodman, J. M., Lyons, S., Wheeler, E. Level, C., & Thomas, M. (January 2016). *AMP!* Academic Intervention Workshop at Kentucky State University. Frankfort, KY.

Goodman, J. M., & Cadena, N. (June 2015). *From college fit to success.* GO College Collaborative Joint Meeting. Chicago, IL.

Goodman, J. M., & Cadena, N. (May 2015). *The process of college match.* Talent Search "Effective Practices" Forum. Washington, DC.

Spinetti, J., & Goodman, J. M. (May 2015). *Using student tracking data to improve college access programs.* Association for Equality & Excellence in Education TRiO Conference. Niagara Falls, NY.

Goodman, J. M., Cadena, N., & Hicks, D. (March 2015). *Comparing student financial aid packages.* GO College Joint Team Meeting. Washington, DC.

Goodman, J. M., Cadena, N., & Hicks, D. (October 2014). *Creating a data-driven culture.* Pennsylvania Federal TRiO Annual Conference. Seven Springs, PA.

Goodman, J. M., & Swabenbauer, M. (October 2014). *Customizing college access standards for students.* Pennsylvania Federal TRiO Annual Conference. Seven Springs, PA.

Goodman, J. M., Rosenberg, J. W., & Wilson, K. (June 2014). *The campus visit experience: A four-year plan for high school students.* Presentation on Curricula Which Impacts Student Engagement at the GO College Collaborative Meeting. Denver, CO.

Goodman, J. M. (July 2013). *Achieving excellence in academics, leadership, community service & brotherhood.* Keynote Address at the Brother 2 Brother / S.A.A.B. 2013 Summer Bridge Academy Closing Ceremony / Indiana University Northwest, Gary, IN.

Goodman, J. M., & Brooms, D. R. (May 2013). *I feel like I'm not alone here: The African American Male Initiative at the University of Louisville.* Poster presentation at the University of Louisville Ideas to Action Critical Thinking Institute. Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M. (April 2013). *Bring your "A" game college student panel discussion.* University of Louisville Think College Now College Preparation Conference, Louisville, KY.

PRESENTATIONS cont.

Bledsoe, T., & Goodman, J. M. (February 2013). *Conversation on strategies to increase retention, persistence & graduation rates of males of color*. Black & Latino Student Symposium / University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

Brooms, D. R., & Goodman, J. M. (January 2013). *Goals, relationships & commitments toward college completion*. University of Louisville's A.A.M.I. High School Connection Program / Doss High School, Louisville, KY.

Cuyjet, M., & Goodman, J. M. (November 2012). *Young Men of Color Speak Out: Real students, real problems, real solutions*. MTRP Symposium & Professional Development Day Panel Discussion / University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

Wint, E., & Goodman, J. M. (November 2012). *Strengthsquest: Discover & develop your strengths in academics, career, and beyond*. Porter H.A.N.D.S. Training / University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M. (June 2012). *Bringing your "A" game*. Alpha Phi Alpha, Inc. Midwestern Region Leadership Development Institute / University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

Skerritt, L., Goodman, J. M., Anthony, M. D., & Seals, C. (April 2012). *The African American male initiative at the University of Louisville*. Kentucky Association of Blacks in Higher Education Annual Conference, Bowling Green, KY.

Hamilton, B., & Goodman, J. M. (April 2012). *Admissions overview; Fundamentals & benefits of a law school education*. Invited presentation for the University of Louisville Debate Team, Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M., Cuyjet, M., Skerritt, L., Strickland, N., & Welch, B. (March 2012). *Organizing an international symposium as a civic engagement leadership experience*. American College Personnel Association National Convention, Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M., Anthony, M. D., Skerritt, L., & Seals, C. (March 2012). *From start to finish: African American male initiative*. American College Personnel Association National Convention, Louisville, KY.

Hamilton, B., & Goodman, J. M. (September 2011). Co-Moderator, *Big brothers and big sisters of Kentuckiana: Discover law panel discussion*. University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law, Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M. (September 2011). *Balancing student leadership & academics: Enjoying the best of both worlds*. Cultural Center Let's Talk Series / University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M. (September 2011). *African American male initiative overview*. College of Arts & Sciences / General Education 101 Course / University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

PRESENTATIONS cont.

Goodman, J. M., Vereen, K., & Hunter, M. (September 2011). *Successfully navigating college transition & roommate interactions*. Life Skills Classes / West End Boys School, Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M., Reddock, R., & Blakeney, M. (May 2011). *The relationship between student engagement & academic achievement*. University of the West Indies / University of Trinidad & Tobago / University of Louisville International Service Learning Program, Trinidad & Tobago.

Goodman, J. M., Cuyjet, M., Anthony, M. D., Suddeth, T., Cornute, T., & The African American Male Initiative Task Force. (April 2011). *A.A.M.I. campus presentation*. University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M., & Anthony, M. D. (March 2011). *The University of Louisville's African American male initiative: Retention, persistence and graduation*. National Conference on the Black Family in America, Louisville, KY.

Goodman, J. M., & Szarleta, E. (November 2010). *Challenges of community engagement & collaboration*. T.R.I. National Training Conference / United States Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D.C.

Goodman, J. M. (June 2008). *Effective management of credit and financial resources*. Student African American Brotherhood - Summer Bridge Academy / Indiana University Northwest, Gary, IN.

LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ECC	SSEM Professional Development Day Planning Committee	2018
Kentucky State University	Ombuds & Liaison to the President	2017 – 18
Kentucky State University Pre-Law Society	Co-Advisor	2016 – 18
President's Commission on Academic Prioritization	Member	2017 – 18
SACSCOC Accreditation Reaffirmation Committee	Reviewer	2017 – 18
Alpha Phi Omega Service Fraternity	Advisor	2017 – 18
SummerBridge Louisville Board of Directors	Member	2015 – 18
Kentucky State University Staff Senate	President	2016 – 18
Presidential Cabinet of Kentucky State University	Member	2017 – 18
Doctoral Dissertation Projects	Independent Consultant	2013 – 17
Ronald E. McNair Grant Proposal Writing Committee	Member	2017
Institutional Budget Development Work Group	Member	2017
Kentucky State University All University Court	Member	2016
Student Success Mentoring Program Committee	Member	2016
Collegiate-100 Student Organization	Advisor	2016
Men's Conference Planning Committee	Member	2015 – 16
Academic Advisor & Administrative Asst. Search Committee	2015
Using Data to Improve Outcomes Training Team	Consultant	2014 – 15
College Transition Action Network	Member	2014 – 15
African American Graduation Ceremony Committee	Member	2013
Woodford R. Porter Scholars Advisory Group	Member	2012 – 13
Cultural Center Director Search Committee	Member	2012 – 13

LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT cont.

American College Personnel Association | Member	2011 – 13
Latino & Black Student Symposium Committee | Member	2010 – 13
Kentucky Association of Blacks in Higher Education | Member	2010 – 13
Undergraduate Admissions Porter Scholars | Co-Facilitator	2012
Call Me Mister Program Feasibility Study Team | Member	2012
Indiana University Student Government Association | Senator	2009 – 10
Indiana University Environmental Action Committee | Vice Pres.	2009 – 10
Westville, IN Correctional Facility | Motivational Speaker	2007 – 09
Event Planning & Fiscal Management Committee | Director	2006 – 09
Rites of Passage Youth Leadership Program | Mentor	2002 – 03
N.A.A. Speakers Association Advisory Board | Member	1999 – 00
West Suburban Daycare Action Council | Chairman	1990 – 91

TRAINING & CERTIFICATIONS

NACADA Academic Advising Summer Institute	2016
Grantwriting Fundamentals Workshop	2011
Grantsmanship: Navigating the Funding Marketplace Seminar	2011
Online Faculty Certification | Ivy Tech College	2010
Relationship Enhancement Workshop	2008
Interpersonal Communications Instructor Training	2008
Prepare/Enrich Conflict Resolution Training	2007
Professional Speaker Certification	1999
Professional Speakers of Illinois Training School	1999
Leadership Development Course | United States Army	1986
Western Europe Cultural Training | Ulm, West Germany	1984

TECHNOLOGY EXPERIENCE

- Adobe Acrobat
- Adestra
- Blackboard Academic Suite
- BANNER
- Blumen
- Colleague
- Consensus Search Software
- Data Depot
- eConnect
- Estudias
- Goldmine
- GroupWise
- Infinite Campus
- Lotus Notes
- Microsoft Office Suite
- MyPortal

Oracle
OrgSync
PageUp
Parchment
PeopleSoft
Publisher
Salesforce
SharePoint
Skype
Social Media Platforms
SPSS
Student Manager / Empower
Survey Monkey
Vista Plus Database Software
WIRED

HONORS & AWARDS

A.A.M.I. Uncle Joe Award | University of Louisville	2015 – 18
The Good Man Award | Kentucky State University	2016 – 17
Golden Key International Honor Society	2013 – 16

HONORS & AWARDS cont.

Academic Scholarship Tuition Awards | University of Louisville	2010 – 12
A.A.M.I. Service Award of Appreciation | University of Louisville	2012
Office of Diversity Programming Commendation | IN University	2010
High School Reunion Excellence Award	2010
S.A.A.B. Program Endurance Award | Indiana University	2010
Founders Choice Award for S.A.A.B. College Retention Program	2010
Campus Council on Diversity Group Award | Indiana University	2010
Purdue University Upward Bound Appreciation Certificate	2007
Banking Center Management Productivity Awards	2003 – 04
Member of the Year | Publicity Director | Speakers Association	1999