

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
INSTITUTION: PERCEPTIONS OF ADAPTATION AND IDENTITY

A Dissertation by

Bobby D. Berry

Master of Education in Exercise Science, Wichita State University, 2013

Bachelor of Arts in Exercise Science, Wichita State University, 2011

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

Jean Patterson, Committee Chair

Aaron Austin, Committee Member

Kristin Sherwood, Committee Member

Mark Vermillion, Committee Member

Jason Herron, Committee Member

Accepted for the College of Education

G. Clay Stoldt, Interim Dean

Accepted for the Graduate School

Coleen Pugh, Dean

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black males at a predominantly White institution (PWI) and how they make sense of their experiences, in addition to how those experiences impact their identity. The use of Surprise and Sensemaking (Louis, 1980) and Black Identity theory (Cross Jr, 1971) allowed the researcher to examine both the student's previous experiences and their current experiences on campus to better understand how Black men adapt to their current environment. During this study it was determined that many Black men have found themselves conditioned to be hyper aware of their "Blackness" and were taught at an early age how to navigate "White America". The research gathered and analyzed through this study shows that the Surprise and Sensemaking framework helps to identify why Black males may or may not encounter surprise while at a PWI, additionally Black Identity Theory helped to uncover whether or whether not the identity of Black Males is impacted while at the PWI. This research can be used to understand better how Black men at PWI's adapt and find a sense of belonging while circumnavigating the many challenges and barriers they will encounter at a PWI.

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CHAPTER 1

Diversity and inclusion are important topics within higher education and scholars have noted the unequal distribution of not only racial demographics, but also the experiences, identity and adaptation of minority students on college campuses across the U.S., specifically that of Black ¹males (Chang, 2001; Smith et al., 2012). Any examination of the higher education landscape in the U.S. begins with understanding the complex realities and contexts associated with such a multifaceted institutional arrangement.

Research Problem

Predominantly White institutions (PWI) see the need to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse body of students (Harper & Newman, 2016), as they tend to have greater than 50% of the student body who identify as white. In contrast, African American students made up 12% of the student population at four-year public predominantly white institutions, 13% of the student population at four-year private nonprofit institutions, and 29% of the student population at four-year private for-profit institutions (Hussar, 2020). Seeing that African Americans make up such a small percentage of higher education institutions, PWIs are feverishly trying to grow the numbers of black students on their campuses. To increase their student racial and ethnic diversity, PWIs have employed two different approaches - structural and student experience (Dumas-Hines et al., 2001; Milem, 2003; Milem et al., 2005).

¹ In this study the terms “Black” and “African American” will be used interchangeably, as research, time and society have evolved and so has the preferred term.

Types of Diversity Initiatives

Structural diversity is increasing the proportion of African American students attending higher education and refers to the numerical and proportional representation of students from different racial/ethnic groups in the student body (Hurtado et al., 1998). Institutions that emphasize structural diversity put their efforts into increasing the number of African American students. Historically, structural approaches have been the dominant approach used by higher education organizations when discussing, examining, or addressing student diversity (Jones et al., 2002), especially in regard to recruiting African American students (Johnson et al., 2007). Structural approaches are often heavily reliant on descriptive demographic data from institutional or governmental entities that illustrate recruitment or enrollment trends (Dumas-Hines et al., 2001). One strategy associated with a structural approach is to examine the data about the number of students of color attaining higher education degrees within one of the previously mentioned higher education categories (e.g., 4-year public university). For example, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2019) noted the percent of Black students attaining a bachelor's degree, nationally, has only slightly increased between 2000-2001 to 2015-2016 from 9% to 11%, while during that same time frame the number of Hispanic students attaining a bachelor's degree has more than doubled from 6% to 13%. Many higher education organizations use these data to inform future strategic priorities or student recruitment initiatives in regards to specific groups of students. When institutions of higher education focus primarily on increasing minoritized enrollment numbers and headcount, the individualized experience of the Black student is not necessarily taken into consideration (Jackson & Moore, 2006), resulting in more higher education organizations moving towards adopting student-centric approaches that emphasize diverse experiences and connect with student retention initiatives.

The second type of diversity focus is characterized by the interactions that students have with difference. Within this approach to increasing diversity, students are influenced by the interactions they have with diverse ideas and information as well as by the interactions they have with people who are different from them (Milem et al., 2005). Many students of color attending PWIs have different higher education experiences than their white peers (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). As a result, a typical way PWIs attempt to focus on student experiences is through the development of institutional drivers, offices, and positions that directly track, connect, and in theory support students of color while on PWI campuses.

Institutional drivers such as the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, Core Values, and Mission Statements prioritize diversity, thus codifying expectations for future diversity-related metrics (Wilson et al., 2012). Since PWIs are searching for ways to attract a more racially diverse student population, the creation of offices focused on diversity and inclusion formalized student experience-based structures on campuses. As a result, PWIs have created diversity-related positions in administration and these efforts are popular ways of diversifying minoritized students' experience at PWIs. Roles such as Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), Director of Diversity and Inclusion Excellence, Senior Diversity and Inclusion Officer, and Associate Director of Intercultural Affairs and Inclusive Programming, just to name a few, have been created in the last decade to spearhead these initiatives (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007; Williams, 2019). As Pennamon (2018) noted, 2- and 4-year institution diversity officers identified a major problem for the CDO role is simply defining what diversity means to a particular school, college, or university. In turn, this affects the institution's goals for student success and completion, in addition to the student experience (Pennamon, 2018). Program initiatives such as Black Student Union (BSU), Black Academic Honor Society (BHS), Greek

Life, and Diversity Ambassadors have been designed to develop and facilitate links within and between minority students with the intention of using these initiatives to grow enrollment.

Ultimately these “student” centric programs and initiatives are designed with the intent to engage and retain students of color, however the students’ voices are often not considered when these program decisions are made.

Student Voice and Black Male Experiences with Identity and Adaptation

In order for an institution to make a genuine commitment to recruiting and retaining African-Americans, hearing and ultimately listening to the student voice is important (Dunn, 2008). The student voice is often unheard, and specifically that of the Black male voice. Black males are often left with identity struggles that tend to take on a particular intensity when the "longing to attain self-conscious [personhood]" means negotiating the multiple dimensions of their identities in an environmental context that may be neither inclusive nor welcoming (Stewart, 2002, p. 579).

Rare, underrepresented, and hard to retain are words that researchers have used when describing Black men on college campuses (Strayhorn, 2018). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that Black males who attend PWIs frequently experience loneliness, isolation, and invisibility, which often are accompanied by mental anguish and academic costs (McCabe, 2009). Black identity is impacted by the racism, isolation, sociocultural challenges, and academic obstacles that many of these students face at PWIs (Harper & Quaye, 2007). When Black males enter a PWI, they become hyper-aware of the various groups to which they belong (e.g., BSU, BHS). They also understand the significance and meaning of belonging to those groups (e.g., privilege or disadvantage, resources held by the group, and how the group is perceived by other groups) so some choose to accept their group memberships (place and position). The thoughts, feelings, and

emotions of navigating these so called “memberships” can cause the student to feel they are in a tug-of-war between themselves and the institution, which can ultimately lead to the student rejecting their membership (Thomas et al., 2012). When caught in this psychological and social-emotional tug-of-war, some Black students attempt to sabotage their achievement, mentally disconnect, withdraw physically from group activities or they leave the institution altogether. When individuals leave the institution, doing so allows for a physical, mental and even an emotional disconnect from their experiences, an example of having rejected their membership (Harper, 2007). These experiences contribute to how Black males construct their racial identity as they navigate the PWI campus community.

Life for Black males in mostly White schools often means daily struggle and recurring crises. They struggle to find out what the rules of the game are, officially and unofficially. This notion of “playing the game” has caused Black males at PWIs to experience a disconnection between their high aspirations and their ability to be academically integrated into their institution. Research suggests that Black males at PWIs have significantly lower levels of academic integration, are less satisfied with their university, and suffer more from interferences, such as discrimination and inadequate study habits than White students (Nettles et al., 1986). Frankly, despite well-intended diversity initiatives, Black students are suffering at the hands of institutional “whiteness.”

It is important to understand that Whiteness is not only about race and racism. Whiteness is a lived experience. It is an ideology, a system of beliefs, policies, and practices that enable White people to maintain social power and control (Thompson, 1997). For Black males, the feeling of “whiteness” is an omnipresent problem, and not by way of color or racial identification, but felt by way of being at sea in a hostile environment. The environment results

in painful difficulties. White teachers, fellow students, and curricula not only accumulate year after year for Black children as individuals and as a group but specifically as Black men which regularly brings to mind the collective memory of past discrimination (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Even with the memories of discrimination Black students still have the drive to thrive and succeed and to pursue higher education, and from 2000 to 2017, college enrollment rates increased for Blacks from 31 to 36 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). However, as of fall 2018 Black men have the lowest college completion rate at 40 percent (Bridges, 2018). Research on Black males' educational experiences in urban contexts reveals a complex interplay of individual behaviors and institutional forces (Brooms, 2019). For example, Black males at PWIs, when compared with those at HBCU's, do not feel integrated into the campus and find it hard to stay at the white institution (Harwood et al., 2012). There are institutional barriers that affect the retention of students of color. Institutional barriers to Black student retention include lack of understanding of the culture of Black students, unawareness of and inability to address the needs of Black students, inappropriate academic standards, inability to assist Black students in navigating the university system, and university personnel and administration's negative attitudes toward Black students (Credle & Dean, 1991).

Although HBCUs enroll only 12.9 percent of the total Black undergraduate population, HBCUs graduated approximately 21.5 percent of all Black undergraduates (Provasnik & Shafer, 2008), meanwhile the remaining 87.1 percent of Black undergraduates attend PWIs. Despite the miniscule populace of Black students attending HBCUs, these institutions advanced a greater percentage of undergraduate students of color than PWIs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Black students at HBCUs are more likely to report higher grade point-averages, better psychological development, greater satisfaction with campus activities and cultural

support, and academic growth and maturity. Moreover, students have better relationships with faculty and staff and are more likely to aspire to an advanced degree (Dwyer et al., 2000). This shows culture, intentionality, representation, and relatability at the institution can have a strong impact on Black students' racial identity and adaptation to the university

Virtually nothing is known about the Black male experience at a PWI (Harper & Nichols, 2008). If Black males are valued and wanted at the PWI, why are those voices not being heard? Why are these students being left to grapple with their racial identities as they adapt to an unfamiliar environment? It is necessary to fully understand the Black male experience at a PWI and enable key stakeholders in education to better serve African-American males (Jackson & Moore, 2006). What is known is Black males struggle to develop coping strategies to fit in and succeed in PWIs, which primarily is due to a mismatch between the students' background experiences and the collegiate culture and climate (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). PWIs now make more intentional efforts to emphasize valuing diversity and enhancing the experiences of Black students. Yet, these efforts also likely contribute to Black male students' experiences upon coming to a PWI not corresponding to their expectations of an inclusive campus where they are valued.

Theoretical Framework

Expecting a campus to be diverse and inclusive and then finding out it is the exact opposite can lead students of color to experience higher levels of racial stress, receive less validation of their academic competence, and encounter significantly more academic and social adjustment challenges than their White peers (Harper & Newman, 2016). These experiences lend themselves to exploring how their Black identity impacts, shapes, and factors into the experiences had on campus. The idea of expectation may result in a negative experience, when a

person encounters events which are discrepant from the predictors (surprises), a reprocessing of interpretation of meaning is triggered (sensemaking) (Warner & Brown, 1995). The key to survival is an ability to rapidly attend to, identify, and learn from surprising events, to decide on present and future courses of action (Itti & Baldi, 2009). In addition to identifying and learning, being able to evaluate the experience and influence of that experience on one's identity is a critical component to navigating within the institution (Davis III et al., 2006). Black racial identities are complex, however being able to examine Black identity allows for understanding one's individual self as well as the social context of being Black (Cross Jr, 1971). For this study, I used Louis' (1980) theory of surprise and sensemaking and Cross' theory (1971) of Black identity.

Surprise and Sensemaking

Surprise and sensemaking is a framework that considers how a newcomer experiences a new organizational context. The model was created by M.R. Louis in 1980 and emerged from the turnover and socialization literature in business. It is still useful for exploring how newcomers, such as Black male students, cope with transitions and reconcile the surprising misalignment of expectations and actual experiences. This framework considers the expectations newcomers bring to a new organizational context, in addition to five types of surprises (conscious expectations, self-expectations, unanticipated features, internal reactions, and cultural assumptions) (Warner & Brown, 1995).

Surprise Met With Expectation

When evaluating "surprise," the first form arises when *conscious expectations* about college are unmet. An example of this would be when the student attends a university based on social media or promotional materials which advertise a diverse campus, however, once the

student arrives there, the presence of students and faculty of color is minimal (Warner & Brown, 1995). The second form of surprise occurs when *self-expectations* are unmet. This form of surprise is characterized by the student's self-assessment of skills, values, and needs. An example of unmet self-expectations would be if a student had hopes of belonging to a group (BSU, Greek Life), however, once acclimating to the environment their interests did not align with those of the group (Warner & Brown, 1995). The third form of surprise is encountered when unconscious or *unanticipated features* of the experience are unmet. In this form, thoughts previously not considered important in the experience emerge and become important to the student (Warner & Brown, 1995). An example of this could be when the Black male student finds he unexpectedly enjoys his peers and faculty regardless of the lack of diverse representation in and outside of the classroom, illustrating that for some student's representation is less of a factor in their enjoyment of their collegiate experience. The fourth form of surprise is the difficulty in accurately forecasting one's *internal reaction* to a new experience (Warner & Brown, 1995). How the new experience feels, as opposed to how the individual expected it to feel, is difficult to anticipate and often a surprise. An example of this would be if the student assumed that he could handle navigating a PWI without an issue, then ultimately felt isolated and lonely during his time on campus. The fifth form of surprise occurs from *cultural assumptions* the student makes (Warner & Brown, 1995). Specifically, cultural assumptions derived from previous experiences may provide inappropriate operating guidelines in the context of the new experiences. The cultural assumptions fail and produce surprise. An example of this would be if an African-American male student assumed that other students who were not of color would treat him differently based on his race. This same positive or negative experience could have been had during his time at a previous institution. For this study, I will be examining the participants' stories to determine

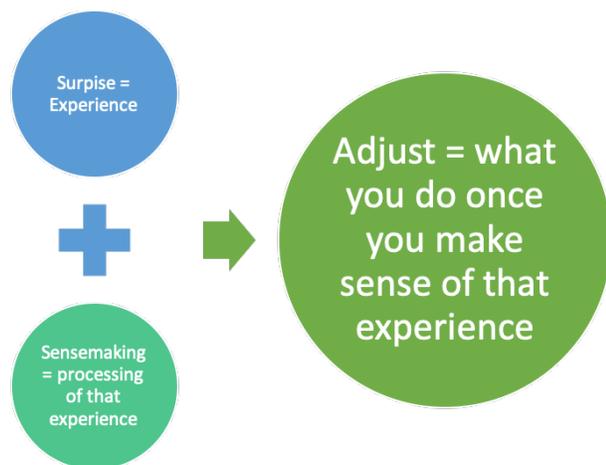
whether they experienced any or all of these forms of surprise once they arrived on the PWI campus. This theoretical idea along with the forms of surprise will be used to inform this study by asking participants questions related to their choice to attend the institution (conscious expectations), groups that the student is, was or currently a part of (self-expectations), unanticipated enjoyable occurrences (unconscious experiences), what expectations were had prior to attending the institution (internal reaction to a new experience), and postulations made about other stakeholders on campus (cultural assumptions) are further elaborated below.

Making Sense of the Initial Surprise and Processing the Experience

Sensemaking and emotions are deeply intertwined. Researchers define sensemaking as beginning when an event causes a previously coherent representation to break down (Maitlis et al., 2013), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Surprise and Sensemaking



During the process of sensemaking it is common to ask two questions: “What’s the story here?” and “now what should I do?” Asking “what’s the story here?” helps to identify an event and call it into existence. This question focuses on the role of sensemaking processes in shaping event attention (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001). Asking “now what should I do?” brings meaning to an

event that can enable future action. In focusing on the meaning of events, and how meaning shapes and constrains actions in response to events, clarity can be achieved and perspective can be obtained (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). Asking study participants to recall a time during their college experience that caused them to pivot (either positively or negatively) and or an experience they would consider a defining moment allowed for transparency of the surprise and their handling of that surprise.

There are two phases to sensemaking, that of outsider to newcomer then newcomer to encounter. When beginning work (or in the case of the proposed study, when entering or adapting to college), the individual passes from outsider to newcomer and enters the encounter stage (Louis, 1980). Sensemaking is generally understood as triggered by events or situations for which the meaning is unclear or contrary to expectation, such that a previously coherent representation breaks down or new cues cannot be integrated into an existing representation (Maguire et al., 2011).

Impact of Perspective: Turnover and Socialization

Two significant perspectives, Turnover and Socialization, can ultimately shape, alter, and impact one's experiences. Louis (1980) examined encounter and newcomers' anticipations against the reality of their new work experiences. Differences between anticipations and experiences (including the previously described unmet expectations) become apparent and contribute to reality shock and these two different outcomes (Louis, 1980).

Voluntary turnover among newcomers is attributed to unrealistic or inflated expectations that individuals bring as they enter an organization (Bray et al., 1974). This approach speaks to forms of surprise such as conscious expectations (what the Black male student expects to experience upon arrival at the PWI does not match his actual experience), self-expectations (the

Black male student compares his skills, values, and needs with those of the PWI and finds them lacking), and cultural assumptions (a mismatch exists between the Black male's culture and that of the PWI). Voluntary turnover occurs when the Black student leaves the university due to unmet expectations (e.g., lack of support, feeling socially disconnected) and the inability to adjust). Involuntary turnover is attributed to differences between newcomers' expectations and early job experiences, or in this case previous academic experiences. This approach connects to forms of surprise such as internal reactions and unanticipated features. Involuntary turnover would occur if the student was asked to exit the University, whether due to academic probation or any type of misconduct (e.g., violations within registered student organizations). While students who have left the institution were not interviewed, if the student thought of leaving the institution was examined. These potential experiences were addressed, examined, and evaluated during the individual interviews.

Socialization refers to the individual's adaptation to the organization. Adaptation occurs with the passage from newcomer to insider status. Once adapted the newcomer has assumed an insider role, which is an indication of the completion of socialization (Louis, 1980). Newcomers become insiders when and as they are given broad responsibilities and autonomy, entrusted with "privileged" information, included in informal networks, encouraged to represent the organization, and sought out for advice and counsel by others. For this study, socialization can be seen in Black males who adapt to groups and networks at their PWI and ultimately become immersed in the organization. They step into leadership roles on their campus or find various connections in different academic (faculty mentoring, assisting with research) and social (student involvement, Student Government Association) environments. These experiences provide

individuals with the tools they need to succeed academically, in the workforce, and in other social arenas (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001).

Adaptations of Black Students

Black students face distinctive challenges, not only must they develop a stance toward other Black students, Black culture, and social organizations (Smith & Moore, 2000), but they must also establish some level of comfort in their interactions with White students and faculty (Mack et al., 1997). Individual Black students resolve these challenges in different ways, varying in the degree to which they identify with other Blacks and take part in Black social and cultural life and in the extent to which they feel at ease and even fluent in the majority culture (Cole & Jacob Arriola, 2007). In addition to the usual school pressures, a Black student must typically handle cultural biases and learn how to bridge his or her Black culture with the prevailing one at the White university (Sedlacek, 1999). Making sense of these challenges, experiences, and feelings can ultimately influence Black male students' view of themselves.

Cross' Stages of Black Identity

As a Black student navigates through their collegiate career, awareness of Black identity becomes heightened (Cross Jr, 1971). Cross elaborated four stages of Black identity: (a) pre-encounter, when a person thinks of the world as the opposite of Black. An example would be a Black male student thinking he does not have to assimilate or play down his "blackness" to fit in on a white campus; (b) encounter, when experience disturbs one's view of their identity. An example would be when the Black student feels hyper-aware of his blackness and becomes obsessed with all levels of engagement (speaking, walking, mannerisms); (c) immersion, when everything of value must be Black. For example, when a student joins every Black organization on campus (e.g., B.S.U. Greek Life) to feel connected

to their culture; and (d) internalization, when it is possible to focus on things other than one's racial group. An example of this would be when a student connects with community initiatives or organizations (non-profits) as a way to escape any negative emotional connection to their "Blackness." These stages of identities contribute to the barriers and experiences of Black on campuses across the country and will be explored in interviews with Black male university students.

These models describe the process by which individuals in new situations encounter, respond to, and reinterpret "surprises," experiences that differ from what was anticipated or assumed. I utilized these frameworks to examine the experiences of Black males at a PWI and how they made sense of their experiences at the institution and how the process of sensemaking interacted with their racial identity.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Black male students at a PWI through the lens of Sensemaking and Surprise (Louis, 1980) and Stages of Black Identity (Cross, 1971). Degree seeking Black male undergraduates in different academic standing (Freshman-Senior in addition to transfer students) were asked to deeply reflect on their time at the institution and to provide insight on their experiences. This study will add to the current body of literature and potentially provide PWIs with information needed to improve the collegiate experience for students of color, more specifically Black males. The following three questions guided the research into the experience of Black males at a PWI.

1. Why did Black male students choose to attend a PWI?
2. How do Black males' experiences at the institution compare to their expectations?

3. How do Black male students make sense of their identity while adapting to a PWI?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter presents the research and scholarship on African-Americans in higher education specifically Black males, and specifically on predominantly white campuses. This review will also include PWIs response to diversity, supports systems for Black men, Black male identity, HBCUs role in the Black experience, and barriers Black men face in higher education.

PWI Response to Increase Campus Diversity

In today's institutions of higher learning, diversity is considered a transformative tool that allows universities to attain their mission and contribute to the betterment of society (Mohamad Karkouti, 2016). As a way to diversify their campuses, PWIs have increased their programming options in order to attract students of color. Examples are programs initiated at the College of William and Mary focused on raising the academic skills of Black high school juniors. A five-week summer program was created with the intent to increase the pool of eligible Black high school seniors. Rutgers University has created special mailings for minority students, conducted telephone contacts, issued personal invitations to campus receptions, established a scholarship program for high ability Black and Puerto Rican students, and initiated a seminar for minority high school students and their counselors. Texas Tech University formed a partnership with a public school district in an effort to recruit and retain minority students (Jeria & Roth, 1992). Financial incentives such as scholarships and grants are often used for both graduate and undergraduates when economic barriers to college matriculation are present. For faculty, salary incentives have been the main method of recruitment (Collins, 1990).

To meet the needs of increasingly diverse campuses, many institutions have developed executive positions to guide their diversity agendas. In many instances, these individuals and

their units are the “face” of diversity efforts and carry formal administrative titles like vice provost, vice chancellor, associate provost, vice president, assistant provost, dean, or special assistant to the president for multicultural, international, equity, diversity, and inclusion are the titles most often referenced. The emergence of these offices in higher education is not without historical precedence, as some institutions had “vice president for minority affairs” roles in the 1970’s, when the first large group of African-Americans enrolled at what were nearly all-white colleges and universities (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). These efforts have allowed diversity and diversity related topics/issues to become more widely discussed on white campuses.

In order to elevate the importance of diversity, many institutions have been providing seminars, workshops, webinars, and other resources for taking the conversations to a deeper level. Yet effective discourse on the topic is often considered challenging and even divisive (Bledsoe et al., 2018). For many college leaders who presumed their campuses operate well, it has become obvious that is not entirely true. Timothy M. Wolfe, the University of Missouri system’s former president, perhaps best embodied that dynamic when a student video captured him staring ahead as student protesters, disturbed by what they saw as the administration’s ineffective response to racism on the campus, blocked his car during homecoming fall 2015. “I was caught off-guard in that moment,” he later said, explaining his reaction. “Nonetheless, had I gotten out of the car to acknowledge the students and talk with them, perhaps we wouldn’t be where we are today.” Similarly, Purdue’s president, Mitch Daniels, faced a backlash when he issued a letter to the community in fall 2015 saying the campus stood in “proud contrast” to Missouri and Yale University, both of which had been rocked by protests. Students quickly pushed back with a list of demands, including that he apologize for minimizing their Black

experiences (McMurtrie, 2016). Now more than ever, Black students are becoming more vocal on how their presence on White campuses inside and outside of the classroom matter.

African-American Presence on the PWI Campus

For many students, college offers the first opportunity to interact with people in racial/ethnic groups not their own (Lo et al., 2017). Although race may not play a major role for all students, it can play an important role in the college experiences of African-American students at PWIs (Chavous et al., 2004). Meaningful interaction between African-American faculty and students has proven to be invaluable in Black males' academic and social development and coping (Brooms et al., 2017; Brooms & Davis, 2017). Over time PWIs have become aware of this notion and many have implemented strategies to grow the presence of African-American staff-related areas at their institutions. These areas include admissions, offices of diversity and inclusion, in addition to positions in student affairs. While diversity in higher education has certainly improved over time, one thing has remained constant, the lack of African-American leadership on college campuses and representation of students and faculty in the classroom.

The issue of African-Americans and their place on college campuses started many years ago. Many students of color are the first in their families to attend college at the undergraduate level and even fewer have parents who attained terminal and professional degrees (Peteet & Lige, 2016). Whites were the largest share of all bachelor's degrees awarded in 2016 (59.9 percent), followed by Hispanics (11.6 percent) and African-Americans (9.4 percent) (Espinosa et al., 2019). These percentages also reflect the low percentage of Black faculty seen in the classrooms on college campuses across the nation.

Black Faculty on PWI Campuses

Faculty play a major role in the student experience. In many academic settings there are minimal Black faculty, which can impact some Black students looking to see or learn from someone who likely has shared experiences. Institutions often espouse valuing diversity and believing in the importance of recruiting and retaining racially diverse faculty; yet, diversity is not reflected in equitable proportions, particularly in the most prestigious positions within the university (Parker et al., 2016). Having an increased number of Black professors present at PWIs may help solidify a supportive relationship with Black students, which in turn may help improve their academic success. A 2000 study showed that African-Americans represented only 4% of professors and associate professors in higher education compared to White Americans, who comprised 87% of tenured faculty members. African-Americans comprised a slightly larger share of the instructor and lecturer pool at 7%, but this pales in comparison to their White American peers, who comprised 82% of the pool (Allen et al., 2000). A more recent study showed the percentage of faculty members from underrepresented groups (African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American) remains less than 8%, and this percentage has not significantly changed in more than 20 years (Fisher et al., 2017). Creating a diverse and inclusive climate on a PWI campus requires institutional leaders to develop admission and hiring policies that promote equal representation of socially oppressed groups (Mohamad Karkouti, 2016). In a study on diversifying the teacher workforce, there were two main arguments in support of increasing teacher diversity. The most common argument is that, in a democratic society, minority teachers are needed as role models for all students, but especially for minority students. The second argument, discussed with less frequency, suggests that minority teachers are particularly suited to teaching minority students because they bring an inherent understanding of

the cultural backgrounds and experiences of those learners to their work (Villegas & Lucas, 2004). Therefore, a stronger presence of African-Americans and their leadership at White institutions may result in a more positive experience for Black students and may also cultivate the success of the student.

Black Male Identity

Just as Cross' Theory (1971) states, Black identity is assumed to occur in stages where one's pre-established orientations are challenged by encountering dominant narratives (Blacks are less than Whites, Blacks are poor, or Blacks are uneducated) and experiences (racism, stereotypes, social injustice, racial inequalities) which alters their preconceived views of themselves in society (Monk, 2016). Eventually, one adopts or buys into views of how others may perceive them (Dancy, 2014a). Educational settings have a powerful influence on the construction of Black male identity (Connell, 1989). These settings often become the place where social inequities and struggles for power get played out (Riddell, 2003). Some of the reasons Black males lack cultural understanding and continue to struggle in educational settings may come from the fact that while growing up, Black male adolescents grappled with the additional task of developing a racial/ethnic identity in America (Monteith & Spicer, 2000). Being able to understand what it means to have identity and culture in America and how this identity shapes one's view of the world and how they function in it, holds value for the Black experience on a white campus (Turner Jr, 2018).

Black males beliefs and attitudes regarding race may influence their perceptions and experiences in the college setting (Mitchell & Dell, 1992). For instance, racial identity has been cited as a major factor in African-American students' social adjustment, such as daily functioning and behaviors, as well as in academic outcomes in predominantly White educational

settings (Chavous, 2002). For example, a quantitative study was conducted to see how racial identity impacts a student's perception of his or her campus climate. Participants were 118 African-American undergraduate students (59% were male) enrolled at a PWI. They were administered the Cross' Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parker & Flowers, 2003). Findings showed those students with higher levels of racial identity/awareness of their blackness (*internalization stage*) experienced higher levels of campus connectedness. This further demonstrates that issues related to identity make navigating socially just as challenging as navigating academically. These challenges can contribute to the struggle to "fit in." A multitude of factors (culture, membership, lack of representation) may make it difficult for Black men to "fit in," particularly those attending predominantly White institutions (PWI) (Strayhorn, 2009).

Subsequently this idea of a Black male being "one of a few" can provide opportunity for change and great impact and a stronger understanding of self on a White campus. Black males have the power to interrupt negative trends by serving as advocates and to pave the way for other Black male students (Bryan & Ford, 2014). Black males have the ability to initiate or be a part of organizations promoting initiatives premised on diversity and the celebration of Black culture and experiences. Initiatives that range from networking and mentoring programs, which provide additional resources for demographically underrepresented groups of students, to "diversity days" where students' backgrounds are celebrated, diversity luncheons where food from different nations is served, and workshops or seminars that focus on aspects of diversity are discussed (Stevens et al., 2008). Black males also have an ability to provide voice and perspective to social issues and changes they would like to see on their campus. Being able to discuss how differences in socioeconomic status, physical characteristics (i.e., skin tone), and gender influence how Black persons experience being racial minorities in various contexts on campus can provide a

powerful outlook that is often missing due to lack of representation of Black students and faculty (Harper & Nichols, 2008).

HBCUs vs PWIs

When exploring “representation” some would propose is this not the point of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)? However, differences exist between the experiences of African-American college students on predominantly Black and White campuses. For instance, Black students at a PWI have lower grade point averages than their peers at HBCUs (Davis, 1994). In addition, many Black students at PWIs say their relationships with their faculty members and peers are less positive, and they often avoid interactions with them outside the classroom (Davis, 1994). For example, a qualitative study with 14 Black male undergraduates explored critical factors believed to contribute to their academic success. The researcher found that extrinsic (wanting to provide a better life for their family, wanting a high paying job) and intrinsic (one’s belief in themselves, succeeding because of passion for their major) characteristics were responsible for the academic success of these students. More specifically, it was explained their relationships with friends and family were factors used to enhance their retention and persistence in college (Nathan, 2008).

Black students on predominantly White campuses often report high levels of alienation and social isolation as well as a pressure to conform to the White ideal. As a way to minimize those feelings Black Greek Organizations have formed on White campuses. A researcher at a PWI explored the impact that a historically Black fraternity had on the college experience and academic success of 20 of its members. According to her study, engagement in a fraternal organization created a sense of community and helped to engender a supportive environment

thereby increasing students' academic success and satisfaction with their college experience (McClure, 2006).

The idea of being connected and having a shared experience and group membership creates a strong sense of culture on Black campuses. HBCUs take pride in the identity of their Black students, which for example can be seen in the Mission statement of Morehouse College (largest men's liberal arts college in the U.S.): to "develop men with disciplined minds who will lead lives of leadership and service" (Mobley Jr & Johnson, 2019). There is a sense of pride coming from the administration and faculty that translates to the students on campus. Morehouse also transmits clear messages of who they want "Morehouse Men" to be: "Renaissance men who are well-read, well-travelled, well-spoken, well-dressed, and well-rounded" (Mobley Jr & Johnson, 2019). This sense of culture and pride is often missing from the experiences Black males have at a PWI. Similarly, Harper and Harris (2006) purported that fraternal engagement of Black males facilitated leadership, cognitive development, and racial identity. Additionally, the academic success of African-American males can be attributed to social capital provided by the HBCU environment (Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016). Although not focused exclusively on Black males, another study measured the impact of faculty-student mentoring with 554 Black students and found that establishing a meaningful mentoring relationship with a faculty member enhanced college satisfaction for Black students (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Strayhorn and Terrell concluded Black students who were frequently involved in research with faculty mentors tended to be more satisfied with college than their same-race peers who did not engage with faculty for such purposes or who did so infrequently. Creating valuable and intentional experiences for Black students has the potential to connect them to their institution socially and academically.

Educational Programs for African-American Male Students

For quite some time, a great deal of attention has been given to the persistent disconnect between Black students and high academic achievement (Henfield, 2012). African-American males in particular face numerous challenges. Throughout the educational pipeline, from elementary to secondary to postsecondary schools in the United States, many African American males lag behind both their African-American female and White counterparts (Jackson & Moore, 2006). African-American male students face higher suspension rates, society misconceptions, pre-conceived low expectations, referrals to the office, suspensions and expulsions, and higher special education placement than their peers (Graham & Nevarez, 2017). Thus, efforts to enhance the academic performances and educational experiences of Black males in college has exploded in the past 15 years, including institutional, state, system-level, and national programs, policies, and calls to action. Key among these efforts is establishing Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs, which primarily are structured as social cohesion programs intended to increase students' college retention and graduation rates (Brooms, 2018a).

Over the last decade, many programs have been designed to push African-Americans and minoritized populations toward college. Consequently, college preparatory programs have been established, many of which help students graduate from high school and transition into college (Knaggs et al., 2015). Black men are afforded an opportunity to be involved in programs that provide additional support such as TRIO, GEAR UP, Upward Bound Math Science, and AVID (Palmer et al., 2014). These programs have made great strides within the education system, however there is still work to be done. The Smith-Johnson Paradigm addresses the issue of why more African-Americans do not matriculate to college in the US education system. The Paradigm examines factors that contribute to how secondary school students make decisions

regarding whether to attend college. Research confirmed the hypothesis there is a perpetual cycle in which children whose parents are college graduates have a greater chance of going to college than children whose parents did not attend college (Smith & Johnson, 2003).

Identifying and creating programs for Black men to thrive in education is nothing new. In the early 1990's several public-school districts proposed or implemented African-American all-male schools (or classes) in a controversial attempt to improve the academic performance and self-esteem of African-American boys. Baltimore, Detroit, Miami/Dade County, Milwaukee, New York, and Norfolk, Virginia, are some of the cities that have experimented or considered experimenting with this method. Although these programs are not identical, they share certain characteristics. First, they attempt to develop Afrocentric curricula and employ teachers who understand the culture, values, and behavior of African-American boys. Second, the programs try to implement an African-American pedagogical approach, by presenting material in a holistic manner more suited to the learning styles of African-American children. Third, the programs attempt to provide African-American male role models or mentors with whom the students can identify. This may include providing extended school days and Saturday instruction. And finally, the programs are frequently controlled by African-American administrators (Weber, 1992).

Once the hurdle of graduating high school has been achieved, the even higher hurdle of graduating college awaits. The notion of "getting" African-Americans to college is at the forefront of the conversation, however what is being done to ensure African-Americans are graduating college and thriving beyond just the classroom? Some may argue that encouraging STEM education related degrees and programming for African-Americans is all the change needed. The term "STEM education" refers to teaching and learning in the fields of science,

technology, engineering, and mathematics (Gonzalez & Kuenzi, 2012). A 2008 U.S. Census Bureau projection had Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American populations expected to grow rapidly over the next few decades. In fact, those populations will comprise approximately 50% of the total U.S. population by 2025. Given this projected growth, some believe it is imperative the U.S. place a concerted effort on increasing college enrollment, retention, and persistence of students of color in STEM education (Palmer et al., 2011). Moreover, underrepresented minorities are more likely to switch to non-science majors and are less likely to complete a science, mathematics, or engineering degree (Tsui, 2007). These programs, initiatives, and the unspoken expectations may also alter Black student's collegiate experience.

Barriers to African-American Male Higher Education Adaptation and Attainment

Research has indicated academic and non-academic barriers may hinder African-Americans from adapting and succeeding in higher education (Jackson & Crawley, 2003). Nonacademic barriers may consist of negative stereotypes, limited access to college, difficulty adapting to campus community and culture and Black identity, meanwhile academic barriers may consist of lack of access to technology and lack of academic achievement.

Negative Stereotypes

African-American males are probably the most highly stigmatized and stereotyped group in America with exemplar images of African-American males ranging from the super athlete, criminal, gangster, or hyper sexed male (Blake & Darling, 2000). Black males are consistently overlooked, undermined, and stereotyped by the predominantly White majority as uneducated, lazy, and violent (Strayhorn, 2017). Black male students face a number of barriers fueled by racial stereotypes such as these and other marginalizing factors that hinder their social, psychological, and academic development in college (Boyd, 2017). Additionally, racial-ethnic

minorities almost universally are targets of negative stereotyping about their academic abilities (Oyserman et al., 2003).

Society's views, as portrayed in both empirical and conceptual reports of Black youth, are defined by these stereotypes (Swanson et al., 2003). Black male culture is almost always interpreted to mean dire trouble and social unrest, and seemingly most Americans are comfortable with this perception (Cuyjet, 2002). These stereotypes may reinforce negative perceptions that some educators hold about Black men (Bailey & Moore III, 2005). These stereotypes can also cripple self-esteem and the ability to thrive in a world where one feels habitually like an outcast. Psychology researchers have posited that individuals who identify with a group not valued by the larger society may protect their self-concept by disengaging from domains in which their group members are expected to fare poorly, such as pursuing higher education (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Limited Access to College

Perhaps the principal obstacle to accessing highly ranked institutions among poor and underrepresented students is the system of selective admissions. College enrollment rates can vary by family income and parent's level of education, common measures of one's socioeconomic status (SES). The odds of success in college are stratified by race/ ethnicity and socioeconomic status resulting in inequality of opportunity in higher education (Strayhorn, 2008). In addition, retention rates are lowest among low-income racial/ethnic minority subgroups such as low-income African-American males (Kahlenberg, 2004). This system favors students who perform well on standardized admissions tests and who have high grade point averages (GPAs) from secondary school. Since students from poor and less-well-educated families tend to perform less well than other student groups by these measures, they are disadvantaged in

competing for access to the most prestigious institutions (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). When research focuses solely on comparing African-American students to White students, many within-group differences based on gender, socioeconomic background, and students' psychological and behavioral characteristics are overlooked (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005).

Difficulty Adapting to Campus Community and Culture

When addressing Black men acclimating to a white campus, a strong presence of support is lacking that would enable Black men to succeed in higher education. Black men often need special nurturing to help them adjust and adapt to the collegiate community. Yet, extensive social support networks for African-Americans are often missing, which can potentially limit their ability to overcome adversity (Brown, 2008; Parker et al., 2016). Without the presence of friends, family, and/or a social structure like the church or sports teams, overcoming adversity becomes more challenging. When support systems are not in place, the ability for Black males to identify with and to be part of a community is limited. The community may be on or off campus, large or small, but it will commonly be based on race or culture. Because of racism, Blacks have been excluded historically from being full participants in many of the White-oriented communities that have developed in the United States and in the educational system. Thus, Blacks not having a supportive group that can give them the advice, counsel, and orientation to sustain them as they confront the larger, often hostile educational systems they must negotiate can be challenging and potentially crippling to their ability to adapt (Sedlacek, 1999). All in all, the campus must become a place that solidly conveys a positive reinforcement to African-American men, not an unsupportive, unsympathetic, and unapproachable environment (Cuyjet, 2002).

Lack of Access to Technology

Lack of access to technology is an academic barrier for Black males. A study on technological preparedness among incoming freshman was conducted at the University of California in 2001. The study found, while access to computers and the internet has grown remarkably across all racial/ethnic categories in recent years, such access varies widely by race, with the lowest levels of computer ownership and internet usage exhibited among members of the African-American and Hispanic communities (Anderson & Kim, 2006; Judge, 2005; Sax et al., 2001). Disparities in access to technology are referred to as the digital divide (Bell, 2018). Although, Black males have increased access, the access to technology does not guarantee its use, the use of technology does not necessarily lead the users to have adequate knowledge and skills to operate computers (Tien & Fu, 2008). Although there is more access to computers and other technology (software, tablets, iPods, smartphones, etc.) in schools, the teachers who are responsible for leading this charge have little or no experience with technology themselves (Bell, 2018). This limited experience has contributed to the heavy emphasis on teaching soft skills (time management, critical thinking and adaptability).

Lack of Academic Achievement

Cognitive strategies such as reasoning and critical thinking skills and the academic rigor of high school courses have become priority for students, parents, and educators in an effort to better prepare students for college. Rigorous core courses can provide students with the cognitive strategies necessary for college success; however, college readiness is not consistently defined in the literature, and there are debates about whether completing minimum college admissions requirements means students are truly college-ready (Woods et al., 2018). It is often the case that African-American students are less prevalent in rigorous courses in high school than Caucasian

students, which can have an impact on a student's perception or how they will perform in college. National reports overwhelmingly reinforce the well-known and unfortunate reality that Black males face incredible barriers as they strive to achieve in school and social settings. One of the most potent and pervasive barriers is that of social injustices that effectively undermine their potential, self-perception, and opportunity to achieve in academic settings (Whiting, 2009). A decade ago, and even as of recent, research has shown, the overall mean achievement scores for Black male students are below those of other groups in the basic subject areas. Black males are much more likely to be placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded and for students with learning disabilities than in gifted and talented classes. Black males are far more likely to be placed in general education and vocational high school curricular tracks than in an academic track (Lee, 1992). These barriers can ultimately impact the view in which Black males enter higher education which can then impact their experience.

To summarize, many elements comprise the Black male college experience, not just his experiences on the campus but the experiences the student brings into the campus. However, it is not a common practice for institutions and specifically that of White institutions to investigate how all of those experiences are influencing and impacting Black males on their campuses. Therefore, it may be value do dive deeper into understanding the influence these experiences has on the identity of these males and ultimately how all these factors contribute to their ability or inability to adapt.

Chapter 3

Research Design Methodology

The research design was a qualitative case study, which provided the means to investigate the perceptions of African-American males that attend a PWI. The intent was to gather data and make meaning from the participant perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This section outlines the research design, describes the study site, data collection plan, analysis methods, research quality, and the researcher's positionality.

Research Design

Qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts. When the approach is applied correctly, it becomes a valuable method for use in higher education to evaluate programs, and develop interventions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Qualitative case studies have also become a comprehensive approach to describing and exploring complex issues, its flexibility allows for creativity in its implementation, yet it is rigorous in gaining an in-depth understanding of the field of interest (Houghton et al., 2015). A qualitative case study was selected due to its approach to gathering and analyzing people's perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). I gathered a sample of African-American male students (Freshman-Senior, transfer, out of state and in state) at a PWI to hear their views on their adaptation to college and the impact that attending the PWI had on their identity. During this study, participants had the opportunity to share and expand on their thoughts, ideas, and feelings via individual interviews. The goal was to capture Black male student voices and use the theories of surprise and sensemaking and Cross' theory of racial identity to interpret those voices. Data was collected from those who recently completed at least one year at The University.

Research Site and Participant Selection

The site selected for this study was a PWI in the Mid-West (pseudonym The University). The University is an urban serving predominantly white research institution and the third largest public university in the state. Two of its stated goals are Inclusive Excellence and Student Centeredness. Inclusive Excellence means being a campus that reflects and promotes in all community members the evolving diversity of society. Student Centeredness promotes holistic student success through a supportive learning environment in which all students past, present, and future continually thrive and grow. Like many PWIs, The University has made a commitment to inclusive excellence and student-centeredness with an emphasis on the “student experience.” In addition, The University has been recognized as having the most diverse student body in the state and the largest percentage of African-American males. This population allowed for Black male’s participants to speak to not only their experiences but also to their perceptions on the commitments of the institution.

Participants were 19 Black males who met the criteria of identifying as Black/African-American male, who were currently enrolled at The University as a Freshman - Senior, were currently taking classes, and who had completed at least a year OR were undergoing their first year with the intent to complete. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. Purposeful sampling means strategically selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated (Patton, 2015).

Homogeneity can be sought along a variety of parameters, such as demographic homogeneity, geographical homogeneity, physical homogeneity, psychological homogeneity or life history homogeneity (Robinson, 2014). My sample was homogeneous by way of demographics (age, sex, race, time at The University and in-state/out-of-state status).

As of Fall 2020, The University had a student population of 15,550, of which 819 were African-American. Of those, 282 identified as African-American males. The class breakdown was 73 freshman, 55 sophomores, 67 juniors, and 81 are seniors. Six are non-degree seeking (students who have special interests in college credit work but no immediate degree objectives, however this study took into consideration only degree-seeking students, which covered the majority of the population. Both in state and out of state students participated and student athletes were excluded from the study, as were students who were not over the age of 18. As an employee of The University, I also eliminated any student who had taken or was currently enrolled in one of my classes. To select from the remaining potential participants, I requested access to the students' names and contact information from the Office of Planning and Analysis (OPA) and based on the data I received, I emailed and invited students who met the above criteria to be a part of the study.

Once a student responded to the email and agreed to participate, I administered a short screening survey through Qualtrics (see Appendix A for Screening Survey). The survey collected information on their level of campus involvement (organizations, fraternity, groups, not involved on campus), residential status (on/off campus), age, citizenship, part or full time status and whether they are a student athlete. This information allowed me to select men with a diverse group of perspectives and experiences within the campus community. I narrowed down my participants by selecting a diverse group of majors, students living on campus, not residing on campus, and those who considered themselves engaged on campus. Following the survey, I emailed the selected students with a description of the study, the research questions, and set up a time for their individual interview. The email script is included in Appendix B.

Data Collection

Data for this study was gathered using in-depth individual interviews. Each participant completed the consent form prior taking part in one 90-minute virtual interview (Consent form included in Appendix C). With the COVID 19 pandemic of 2020 making in-person interviews difficult, I used Zoom to conduct all interviews. The range of participants allowed for emergent design (used to describe a flexible design, in which the detailed framework emerges during the study) or until I reached the point of redundancy/data saturation. The concept of data saturation (developed originally for grounded theory studies but applicable to all qualitative research that employs interviews as the primary data source) entails bringing new participants continually into the study until the data set is complete, as indicated by data replication or redundancy (Marshall et al., 2013). Sufficient data was collected to ensure I achieved a depth and breadth of perspectives and voices that could add to the literature on Black male identity and adaptations on a white campus (Robson, 2002). The intent was for the student to clearly reflect on their surprise and articulate how they made sense of that surprise. Interviews allowed for an assortment of in-depth information from people directly impacted by the study, this allowed participants an opportunity to share their perceptions on identity, barriers, expectations as well as surprises they may or may not have had and how they made sense of those potential surprises. In addition, how those surprises contributed to their experience at a PWI and what they would do differently going forward.

Qualitative semi structured interviews were used for the purpose of this study, as opposed to a more structured interview. Semi structured interviews are conducted on the basis of a loose structure consisting of open ended questions that define the area to be explored, at least initially, and from which the interviewer or interviewee may diverge in order to pursue an idea in more detail (Britten, 1995). The interview protocol and questions are included in Appendix D.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

As is the preferred method for analyzing data in a qualitative study, I began the process of coding and categorizing simultaneously with the data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Analysis literally means pulling things apart to examine them in their smallest components. The researcher deconstructs information and then puts things back together again in a more meaningful way (Lapan et al., 2012). As such, I constantly compared data, incidents, interactions and remarks for properties such as similarities and differences that helped identify categories. Coding is a process used in the analysis of qualitative research, which takes time and creativity. Three steps helped facilitate this process: reading through the data and creating a storyline, categorizing the data into codes, and using memos for clarification and interpretation.

Codes are used to retrieve and categorize data that are similar in meaning so the researcher can quickly find and cluster the segments that relate to one another (Stuckey, 2015). During this process I wrote memos and notes as I identified codes from the data. Memos provide insight on how the researcher arrived at the codes, and how those codes are being used to explain the storyline. These notes are often informal and kept for the researcher's insight and information only. One of the more practical uses of memos is to record how codes were developed and how decisions were made about coding (Stuckey, 2015). Referencing the memos allowed me to dissect the stories told by the participants. This process also allowed me to better determine the similarities and differences in their experiences which provided me an enhanced understanding of how they have or have not adapted to their environment.

It is important that the interview is efficient and the data gathered are as rich, accurate and close as possible to reflecting the real phenomena being studied (Al-Yateem, 2012). With the participant's permission I enabled the audio/visual recording function in Zoom for the interviews

to limit loss of verbal reactions expressed while participants were speaking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Recording is usually achieved through audio or video techniques, and this process has a great deal to offer the researcher (Al-Yateem, 2012). Once recorded, the data was transcribed. Transcription involves close observation of data through repeated careful listening (and/or watching), and this is an important first step in data analysis. Although rarely explicitly defined, transcription refers to the process of reproducing spoken words, such as those from an audiotaped interview, into written text (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). This familiarity with data and attention to what is actually there rather than what is expected can facilitate realizations or ideas which emerge during analysis (Bailey, 2008). I used Otter, an online transcription service that assists in the conversion of human speech into a text transcript. I then followed up with comparing the results from the literature and the themes from interviews to give the study a greater depth and credibility.

Unitizing the process of grouping the data gathered from interviews, memos and observations. I unitized common elements into domains for further analysis. “The overall process of data analysis begins by identifying segments of data set that are responsive to your research questions. This segment is a unit of data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 203). Once the data was analyzed and the units were sorted into relevant categories, I was able to illuminate the research questions with data aligned to the original intent of the study. When the transcriptions and observation field notes were processed into digital format, I identified common words, phrases, and reactions that resulted from the verbal interchange between myself and participant. Once the transcriptions were processed into digital format, I uploaded them into Dedoose. Dedoose is a web application for mixed methods research which can also be used to enable coding of

qualitative data, which can then be used to identify themes. By examining the coded excerpts from the interviews, I categorized the reactions into themes for further exploration.

Finally, I completed the data collection and analysis portion of this study by compiling an interpretative report, inclusive of explanation and description (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The interpretative report included a summary of both the overall findings from the study, as well as conclusions and implications. The triangulation of study findings and the previous literature is a primary focus of this section. I also provide suggestions for future research.

Research Quality

The qualitative design of this study requires the use of established practices to collect, analyze, and make meaning of the data. This methodology allows for a structured process of collecting data, analysis procedures as well as the disclosure of researcher positionality (Lapan et al., 2012). Trustworthiness was utilized to ensure the rigor and quality of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). In qualitative research, truth value is usually obtained from the discovery of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by informants. Truth value asks whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects or informants and the context in which the study was undertaken (Krefting, 1991). Strategies to be employed to ensure trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility involves establishing the truth of the research study's findings; in layman's terms, it means showing the findings are accurate and honest. The reason for this scrutiny is to check the reliability, and authenticity of the research (Harper & Cole, 2012). Triangulation is a procedure for ensuring credibility (truth value) where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study (Creswell

& Miller, 2000). Member checking was also utilized. Member checking is a qualitative technique used to establish the tenet of credibility in trustworthiness. Member checking involved sending a copy of the interview transcript to the participant to ensure his perspective has been appropriately captured. A summary of overall findings was also sent to all participants at the conclusion of the study to verify that the essence of the conversation is reflected (Lincoln & Guba, 1982; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Dependability

Dependability involves participants evaluating the findings and the interpretation and recommendations of the study to make sure that they are all supported by the data received from the informants of the study (Cohen et al., 2013). Dependability in qualitative research means to consistently produce rich and meaningful descriptions of the phenomena. Thus, qualitative researchers who adopt dependable qualitative methods and conduct their analyses in a competent manner are expected to produce results that enrich understanding of the meanings that people attach to social phenomena. To increase dependability, peer-debriefing and persistence were used. As the name suggests, peer-debriefing is the process of checking a researcher's work by another expert in that field (Oliver & Selai, 2001). Persistence is another way to increase dependability, by interviewing an adequate number of participants this will allow for a greater chance to produce plausible finding and rigorous conclusions.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the neutrality and accuracy of the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but are clearly derived from the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). It has been suggested

that confirmability of qualitative inquiry can be achieved through reflexive journaling and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). A reflexive journal is a reflexive document, kept by the researcher in order to reflect on, tentatively interpret, and plan data collection (Belk et al., 1989). I kept a reflexive journal, which included my personal reflections in relation to the study.

Transferability

Transferability involves a slightly more modest claim than might occur with analytic generalization, as transferability readily acknowledges the uniqueness in an initial qualitative study (Yin, 2016). Transferability parallels external validity, which means that the results of a study can be generalized to other samples from the same population. Establishing transferability was accomplished by thick description. Thick description involves the researcher elucidating all the research processes, from data collection, context of the study to production of the final report. Thick description helps others researchers to replicate the study with similar conditions in other settings (Li, 2004). The provision of sufficient details about the research participants and setting so that readers of the research can make a determination as to whether or how the findings from the a study might transfer to their own context (Lapan et al., 2012). Transferability has hopefully been accomplished by way of comparing my data to previous literature and data related to the topic of Black males at PWIs and by way of evidence in my findings.

Ethics

Professional and scholarly integrity is required of all doctoral students in the Wichita State University Educational Leadership Doctoral program. An application was submitted and the study was approved by The University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additionally, all doctoral students are required to complete Collaborative Institutional Training (CITI) modules to ensure ethical procedures are outlined and followed during conducted research. Confidentiality

of participants and the research cite was maintained throughout the research process. All study participants signed a consent form at the time of the interview. I will maintain copies of signed consent forms in compliance with University policy (see Appendix D for consent form). To further protect the confidentiality of participants, their real names have been replaced with pseudonyms when reporting the study findings.

Positionality

Positionality is a central component and highly individualized in qualitative research (Ganga & Scott, 2006). The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the data collection instrument. It is reasonable to expect that the researcher's beliefs, political stance, cultural background (gender, race, class, socioeconomic status, educational background) are important variables that may affect the research process (Bourke, 2014). As the researcher I am also a Black male who is a doctoral student and an Assistant Professor at The University. My relationship with the University started in 2007 as a student, during both my Undergraduate and Master's Degree I had very limited connection to the University. I was not a part of any student organizations nor did I reside on campus. I began teaching as a full-time faculty member in Fall of 2016, since that time my relationship with the University has changed dramatically and I am interfaced with many committees at department, college, and University level. My experiences as a Black graduate and student on the campus has allowed me to advocate for not only students but for faculty members in addition to allowing me access to many tables looking for the Black male perspective. I am one of about ten Black tenure track faculty members at the university. My positionality was an asset because it positioned me to further ask exploratory questions during the interview process, as my participants felt more comfortable and forthcoming talking with me as I identify as a Black male. The participants seem very open and transparent due to the

rapport I established. It was important to let them know this was a safe space and that even though I am employed by the University their names would not be shared directly with any administrators. To ensure my positionality was minimized, I only selected participants that were not current or former students of mine. I also made it clear that I was approaching the participants and interviews as a doctoral student and not as a faculty member. I intentionally stuck to the protocol questions and was careful to not probe or that my follow up questions were misleading.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This chapter presents the findings gathered through analysis of semi-structured individual interviews conducted with 19 African-American male students enrolled at a public, predominantly white university located in a midwestern state (hereafter referred to as “The University”) who shared their stories (see Table 1, below for names of the participants and other demographic characteristics). They were a diverse group in terms of major (five majoring in engineering, three majoring in social work, two communication majors, one majoring in psychology, one majoring in criminal justice, one majoring in political science, one majoring in nursing, one majoring in chemistry, one majoring in music education, one majoring in information technology, one majoring in elementary education, and one majoring in workforce leadership). The men also varied in class rank (one freshman, six sophomores, seven juniors and five seniors), transfer students (one coming from a junior college and two coming from another four-year institution). Their geographical location and upbringing varied as well, all born in the United States, 11 being in state and eight out of state. Four come from a multi-racial home (biracial or living with a white step parent) and 15 come from a Black household (both parents are Black).

Table 1*Participant Pseudonyms and Demographics*

Pseudonym	Major	Academic College	Rank	In or Out of State	Transfer	Multiracial Family
Andrew	Social Work	LAS	Senior	In	No	No
Brad	Social Work	LAS	Junior	In	No	No
Chad	Mechanical Engineering	Engineering	Senior	Out	No	Yes
Cody	Engineering Technology	Engineering	Junior	Out	No	No
Clinton	Psychology	LAS	Senior	In	No	No
Clarence	Integrated Marketing Communications	LAS	Sophomore	In	No	No
Dustin	Engineering	Engineering	Junior	In	Yes	Yes
Derek	Nursing	Health Professions	Senior	Out	No	Yes
Gary	Criminal Justice	LAS	Sophomore	In	No	Yes
Frank	Chemistry	LAS	Freshman	In	No	No
Jim	Workforce Leadership	Applied Studies	Senior	Out	No	No
James	Aerospace Engineering	Engineering	Sophomore	Out	No	No
Mark	Information Technology	Business	Junior	Out	No	No
Nick	Social Work	LAS	Junior	In	No	No
Oliver	Elementary Education	Applied Studies	Sophomore	Out	Yes	No
Sean	Communication	LAS	Junior	In	Yes	No
Vincent	Electrical Engineering	Engineering	Sophomore	In	No	No
Wesley	Music Education	Fine Arts	Sophomore	In	No	No
Zane	Political Science	LAS	Junior	Out	No	No

The findings are presented in themes that emerged throughout the data analysis process, and the perspectives of the African-American male students at a predominantly white institution.

Unheard Voices

Several themes emerged from the data analysis on surprise and sensemaking, Black male identity and the impact on their collegiate experience. The decisions made in Higher Education

specifically for Black men are rarely asked for, however, the perspectives these young men provided were compelling and insightful. Three major themes emerged from the student responses: their upbringing and managing expectations, why they chose to attend this particular PWI, and looking for safe spaces at the PWI.

Upbringing and Managing Expectations

These young men ranged from being born and raised in the city where The University is located to relocating from cities in neighboring states, represented a variety of majors ranging from nursing to music education, and class rank of freshman to senior and all have chosen to attend a state PWI. Although the students were diverse in experiences and thoughts, they shared many commonalities as it concerned learning from an early age how to navigate white society as Black men. The young men shared similar experiences regarding how they have managed being Black men prior to existing on a predominantly white campus. Several students articulated feelings and messages they were taught by their parents and guardians regarding how society views them. Frank shared, “My dad always told me to be calm and calculated, measure twice but cut once, you always have to make sure you don't mess up. Especially, being a Black Muslim male, there's really no room for mistakes.” The notion of being highly competent, in addition to giving little opportunity for someone who does not know you to perceive you as “less than” was common for many of the participants. James stated,

One of the things that my mom told me that always stuck with me is, as soon as I leave that door of our household, nobody cares about you. ...as soon as I entered the world, outside of my family it's me against the world.

These young men were taught from an early age how white society would view them and to temper their expectations accordingly. Brad recalled, “I was taught that, you're gonna always

have to work twice as hard for what you want. Basically, that it doesn't come easy. And it's going to be because of your skin color.” The feeling of “me against them” or the “one man army” mentality was consistent from the participants. While these messages can promote drive, determination, and grit they can also present a level of stress and anxiety. Mark passionately shared the message from his parents, “They preached to us even when we were kids, being a Black man, you know, you have a target on your back, so any little thing you do is always going to be watched, anything at all.” The burden of knowing everything you do will be scrutinized or judged differently than your white peers can be discouraging, yet sadly was a reality for many of these men. Zane echoed similar sentiments he learned from his parents, “just know that you're not going to be looked at or treated the same... just because you're a Black male.” Clarence shared a story about his parents restricting him from playing with toy guns, even a toy as innocuous as a Nerf gun, due to the potential danger it represented for a young Black male like him. He said,

We couldn't have Nerf guns, a lot of my friends from around the block would have those ...but I couldn't own an airsoft gun and I couldn't participate because my parents said you don't want to see a little Black kid running around with a gun.

The perception of being young, Black, and associated with violence was a concern. Clarence partially attributed that concern to growing up in a white neighborhood, which perhaps made his parents hypervigilant. Although a majority of the men grew up in predominantly Black households and neighborhoods, a few, like Clarence, grew up in predominantly white households and or neighborhoods. I found that some of their experiences differed based on their internal (home) and external (neighborhood) environments. For example, when asked about the lessons learned from having a white mother and a white stepfather, Dustin shared,

They were definitely worried about me not having experienced what most Black people go through going up. They kept me educated on that kind of thing as best as they could, even though they obviously didn't have to go through those things, they were definitely worried about my perspective on how other people perceive me.

Dustin found it challenging at times to navigate as a Black man, yet live in a home with white parents. The messages and guiding principles shared with these young men during their formative years contributed to shaping their identity at an early age, most importantly how being Black in predominantly white spaces would impact how they would be viewed by others. These young men ultimately used these lessons to navigate life thus far and eventually brought those same feelings into their collegiate experience. Even though these young men were informed of what to expect as Black man growing up in “White America,” they still made the conscious decision to attend a PWI.

Why The University?

Reasons for choosing to attend The University varied greatly, and while many of these young men did not aspire to attend The University, they took some major factors into consideration. Their decision to attend The University was influenced by its location, affordability and scholarships, and family. Academic major, college preparation programs, and perceptions of diversity were also considerations.

Location

Participants shared location played a part in their decision to attend The University. Wesley put it simply, “I would say the location,” that is, being able to remain in the city in which he was born, his family being local, and the community (family, friends, and church) that helped raised him made his decision to stay a little easier. Jim, who came from St. Louis, vocalized,

“My parents wanted me within seven hours of home.” The ability for Jim’s parents to get to him quickly or for him to get to them, created some comfort and security as he began his collegiate journey. Although most of the men in the study desired to go to college far away from home, the ability to stay within relatively close proximity to family whether by plane or within driving distance was important. Derek said location played a part for him as well. Derek took into consideration a couple of things, one being his close relationship with his mother who had relocated to another state upon his high school graduation and second the fact he had family in the same city as The University. He explained, “I’ll be close to my aunt and then I can just hop on a plane and fly down to see my mom.” Truthfully, several of the participants wanted to have an out of state collegiate experience, however as many state institutions are faced with rising tuition rates, cost of attendance impacted their college choice.

Affordability and Scholarships

Because affordability is a major factor for many students of color, as part of its Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, in 2016, The University began offering in state tuition to students in select urban areas that border the state, with the express purpose of growing enrollment and to increase the population of underrepresented students on campus. This arrangement grants in state tuition to students from specific metropolitan areas in the Midwest, making the cost of attending The University significantly less than out-of-state tuition. Zane made his decision to attend the University based on its affordability thanks to the tuition incentive. He said, “So being from Oklahoma, The University offers in state tuition, it was a big determining factor because it was way cheaper than any school in Oklahoma.” Zane took advantage of the in-state tuition rate even though he was an Oklahoma resident. For students who were residents of the state, finances ranked high when considering the institutions, they could afford to attend. Being able to pay in

state tuition rates was a major consideration when making their college choice. The burden of mounting college debt weighed heavy on many if not all the participants, thus having the opportunity to decrease the likelihood of having to take out student loans was significant in their choice of college. When asked his reason for attending The University, Sean stated “I got in state tuition, so it was the cheapest way, and I really didn't know what I wanted to study at the time, so I thought this would be the easiest.” Like several others, the cost of attaining the degree factored into Mark’s decision to attend a state University. He mentioned,

After talking with my mother, we just sat down and broke down how much money I will be paying over a course of four years to get my degree. And so out of other state institutions, The University was by far the cheapest and honestly at that point, I just made the decision to enroll.

Having limited resources or the fact that most did not come from wealthy families certainly presented its challenges and limited their options.

Along with affordability, scholarships were an incentive. The University awards upwards of 100 million dollars annually in scholarships, over 2 million specifically from academic colleges, however fewer than five scholarships are dedicated to racial minority students. Several of the participants were able to secure scholarships from their academic program. Cody indicated, “The reason I came here was because I got a scholarship. They offered to pay, for full ride scholarship here, so, you know, I'm not somebody that turns down money. So, I came here.” The Scholarship awarded to Cody is a prestigious endowed scholarship for students who are majoring in Business. The availability of scholarships also led Chad to choose The University. He said, “I found out about their scholarship programs, in particular, one of the area’s most prominent scholarship competitions along with a scholarship in Engineering.” The scholarship

Chad was referring to awards 10 prospective engineering students with scholarships for four years of study totaling \$28,500 each. While scholarships helped financially, many of the young men felt being close to family or following in the footsteps of those closest to them was more important.

Family

Many of the students who are natives of the city where the university is located found having family in town or family members who were alumni factored into their decision to attend The University. Brad stated, “The ultimate reason I chose The University was because that's where everybody in my family graduated from.” A strong sense of pride was felt during the interviews. For some participants, being able to walk the same path as the men before them meant something special. Vincent said, “I wanted to go to The University, because my father came here, my uncle came here, so I figured, you know, why not carry on that legacy?” Frank articulated his family ties to The University when he talked about his desire to be a doctor,

I feel like the opportunity that I had here, especially like, the contacts my parents have with most of the doctors and stuff...there is really no point of me leaving, going out of state. So yeah, first choice, my father's alumni and I knew the environment the best.

Frank was proud of his family, their accomplishments, and their local connections. He took pride in the ability to feel he was not starting at “the back of the line.” During what most deem as a pivotal time in one’s life, having family support close by can be vital. For these young men, making their family proud in addition to pursuing a major that will afford them and their families a better life influenced their choice to attend The University.

Academic Major: Engineering

STEM related fields have been heavily promoted within the confines of education and even within the Black community to encourage Black males to seek a career in an engineering field (Fries-Britt & White-Lewis, 2020). A few of the young men cited the fact The University had a reputation for its strong engineering programs helped them decide to pursue their degree at this institution. James explicitly chose The University due to his desire to pursue a degree in engineering, “So I always wanted to do engineering and I want to specifically do aerospace engineering. I found out that The University had one of the best programs in the country for aerospace.” The program’s national reputation prompted James to apply and pursue an aerospace engineering degree. Chad shared, “The University wasn’t my first choice in school as I honestly didn’t know [it] except for the basketball program. I began looking at other schools and then just in general looked like The University would be good for engineering.” Although not necessarily his first choice, after doing some research and talking to advising staff and his parents Chad came to realize The University could provide him with the opportunity to grow professionally and personally while going through what is seen as a highly respected and academically grueling program and career field. The opportunity for career advancement and professional development such as internships with three local and highly competitive companies was also appealing to Chad. For Vincent, the pairing of academic and social support was of high importance, as being part of a network with others who looked like him helped establish comfortability in his choice to attend and pursue a degree in Engineering at The University. Vincent shared, “In one of my first meetings with an on-campus staff before enrollment I was told about NSBE, which helped me to feel more confident in my decision to attend.” NSBE (National Society of Black Engineers), is a student organization created to increase the number of culturally responsible

Black Engineers who excel academically, succeed professionally and positively impact the community. These pockets of support within the desired major played an important role in the feeling of “connection” to not only the program itself but to others in the program who may have similar experiences. James identified Black male mentors who were also Engineers and served as inspirations when thinking about his career. These mentors encouraged him to pursue his passion and to serve as an inspiration for other young Black males wanting to be engineers. STEM related fields often lack males of color, and the five participants majoring in engineering all alluded to representation or lack thereof in their field being something they often think about. Diversity itself has been a “hot topic” for many years in higher education, thus ways to recruit, and retain students are often strategized. Strategies centered on finding ways to engage diverse high school students in college-like experiences to help with their transition into higher education.

College Preparation Programs

Several participants came from diverse high schools which were a part of college preparation programs such as Upward Bound and GEAR UP, which helped them make a connection with The University while they were still in high school. Upward Bound Prep is a federally funded program that specifically provides limited-income and potential first-generation college students with the opportunity to improve their academic, social, and personal skills while preparing for a post-secondary education. Meanwhile GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a college access program that is also federally funded through the U.S. Department of Education and designed to help students in foster care prepare for post-secondary education. Both programs are present on the University campus and have established relationships with local high schools. These relationships allow for on campus

summer experiences and campus tours. This relationship solidified a level of comfortability in attending The University for some of the young men who graduated from area high schools.

Andrew's participation in the Upward Bound program helped him decide to attend the University. He proclaimed,

I was in a program called Upward Bound. And it's, it's on The University campus. I've been familiar with The University ever since I was a freshman in high school. I've taken classes there, and I've done many programs on college preparedness, so It was just obvious, there was no stopping me from going.

Andrew, now a senior speaks highly about his experience, specifically saying that the campus community (faculty, staff, and students) made him feel welcome. Although Clinton was introduced to the University in a similar fashion, his experience differed from Andrew's. Clinton participated in the GEAR UP program in high school, which he felt provided an unrealistic picture of the University's racial diversity. He shared a fascinating experience on getting acclimated with The University, "As a part of GEAR UP, we get a lot of campus tours and a lot of, like the advisors will come to my high school.... when we came on campus, they showed us of course, the basketball players, the track runners, the Black faculty and staff." When asked if those interactions that ultimately swayed his decision to attend changed once he was actually on campus his reply was, "I would use the word bamboozled... I feel like they knew the 'right' parts to show us on campus." Overall, the sentiment the visits were crafted to give an appearance that the campus was more diverse than it truly was left a lasting impression. Along with other institutions and organizations, diversity is something The University says it values and several participants found this message attractive even if it did not always live up to their expectations.

Perceptions of Diversity

To a few of the participants it was clear the messaging of The University being the most diverse institution in the state had resonated with them. Oliver, a transfer student, had a bad experience at his previous predominantly white institution and longed to attend a university with more racial diversity. He revealed his rationale for transferring to The University,

I wanted to go to The University, because in my previous institution, it was very, very, very, very white. I was also called the N word at the institution and they didn't really do anything when I brought it up to them. So, then I decided to transfer here because it was stated that The University is the most diverse campus in the state.

When asked how his expectations compared to reality after a year of being on campus, Oliver shared his disappointment. He replied,

I thought when I got on campus that it was going to be very exciting. I thought the Black Student Union was going to be big, all the Greeks were going to be like, larger especially with The University being larger than my previous institution...You know, and then when I got here it was kind of you know, disheartening.

Vincent shared diversity was also a contributing factor for him choosing to attend The University. The University reached out to his high school and staff recruiters began making connections with students like Vincent. He said, "I ended up at The University ...because admission reps always had these trips to our school, expressing that they're about diversity inclusion." When following up on if his expectation of diversity was met, he replied positively, "Yes, I've been connected to many resources, I have a Black advisor and there is a group geared towards Black engineers" (NSBE). Lastly, Gary explained he was president of the Black Student Union in high school and therefore "wanted to find somewhere where I could continue to spread

diversity, but also be in a diverse area. The University was labeled as the most diverse institution in the state...that information kind of encouraged me.” As Gary has acclimated to campus over the last two years, he too shared a positive perspective on his expectations being met. He praised the work done on campus to support diversity, specifically the work of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI). Frank, as a first-year freshman was looking forward to the opportunities that allowed him to interact and engage with diverse populations. He specifically stated, “I was pretty optimistic about what I was going to get myself into, especially after I heard about the ODI. I felt pretty excited to start my academic career at The University.” As he rounds out his first year, he has been happy with the initiatives on campus that uplift diversity such as Men of Excellence. For these young men, their perspective and interpretation on the “value” of diversity looked different, although it does appear as if the work being done and promoted by The University or those at The University is having a positive impact. The men shared the importance of being in an environment where they can feel like their authentic selves. Although each participant chose The University for his own reasons, one thing they all have in common is the awareness of their “blackness” and how it has influenced their ability to feel at ease on the campus.

Finding Safe Spaces

The third major theme was that of finding safe spaces; this theme had several sub themes emerge which included, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Men of Excellence, Greek life, and Black faculty/staff. These safe spaces contribute to the way the men have acclimated and thrived socially and academically. As a part of its Strategic Plan, The University identified a goal for Inclusive Excellence. The intent of this goal is to create a campus environment where all will feel welcome. With this goal in mind, I asked the young men what made them feel most

comfortable/accepted on the campus. Several of the men were able to examine and articulate they felt exceptionally comfortable on the campus, and even though many of the participants do not live on campus for several reasons (finances, COVID 19, family obligations), their level of on campus engagement was no different than those who did.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) aims to cultivate and sustain an inclusive campus. They strive for academic excellence by creating an environment that educates, empowers, and mobilizes students, campus, and community. The impact of this office was acknowledged by many of the participants. Chad felt the ODI was the environment that made him feel safe. Confidently, he stated

Even if you're not Black or Hispanic, you're welcome in the ODI, they're always looking to help you out, they literally have the tools for anything that you need to be successful.

Even if they don't got it, they know how to find somebody that has it.

The idea of feeling there is a place on campus that is looking out for them and truly understood their life experiences was powerful. The ODI allowed these young men to feel "seen," that is, seen in a way where their experiences are valued and celebrated, their feelings are validated and acknowledged, and most importantly their voices are heard and uplifted. Sean reiterated that thought when he said he valued the ODI because "you're able to be around those who are similar to you that have similar experiences and that look similar to you." ODI's mission and purpose impressed Chad, who expressed, "They want to create for everyone an environment and space within their office to be their complete, honest and truthful self without fear of any judgment, or negativity, you could just be your complete and total self." Chad appreciated having a safe space on campus where he could be his "complete and total self" without being judged.

As Black men on campus and in society the men articulated they often feel “seen” for the wrong reasons or seen as Black men and not just men. As previously stated, many of the men stated that growing up as Black men they need to keep their guard up, especially in white spaces. For Jim, being guarded translated into experiencing loneliness and feeling unmotivated when he first arrived on campus,

My biggest battle with coming to a PWI, was all mental for the most part. It was all about me feeling very alone and feeling very unmotivated from my peers and even my teachers.

Not saying they're all like that, but that was my mindset going in early on.

The transition of coming from towns, high schools, or even home environments where they felt comfortable and mentally at ease being Black men to feeling isolated and alone yet at the same time standing out on campus was a burden for Jim and other participants. Once Jim found his way to ODI, he explained, “I found a group of people that champion me. I found a group of people that want the best for me and they're very vocal about it.” For these men, finding a place on campus where they felt genuinely and actively supported was important to them and helped alleviate some of their stress.

The men shared they often felt in life they must defend themselves, whether for the way they dress, the way they talk, or the way they make sense of the world. Having someone else to defend them meant a great deal to many of them. The idea of being with those who could identify with his experiences was special to Clinton. He stated that ODI “is the one space that I know I will find somebody who looks like me, not necessarily Black, but someone who can identify as being a minority, and somebody who has had to deal with similar adversity in life.” Sean echoed similar feelings on how being in a space with men who looked like him provided him the opportunity to feel comfortable, “We can talk about different things from sports to

politics to be, you know, just kind of on the same wavelength and have things in common.”

While many of the men identified feeling safe within the ODI due to their identity as Black males, that was not the only identity they referenced. Nick added another perspective by sharing his experience as a gay man, “Being a Black gay male, on the campus, I have had a uniquely specific worldview on things.” He also found the ODI a place that not only nurtured and supported his multiple identities, but allowed him to contribute. He said,

The ODI, they work well with your LGBTQ community, with their LGBTQ office coordinator, to the programs that they have, where I am working specifically for that community has given me the opportunity to feel like I'm not only learning, I'm not just a visitor, but I'm contributing as well.

Nick shared these multiple identities made it challenging to connect and feel included. Not only is the Black population small but the population of openly gay Black males is even smaller. The feeling of acceptance when being gay in the Black community posed additional challenges for Nick. However, having a place and space on campus where it is encouraged to be unapologetic about all his identities was freeing for him. Derek, a biracial student whose experience is vastly different from Nick, also found a home at ODI. Derek shared when he entered The University as a freshman “I was excited to see some more diversity from where I came from, Obviously, it was a culture shock.” Struggling with a biracial identity, yet growing up in a predominantly white household, neighborhood, and city he was nervous about how he would adapt to a more racially and culturally diverse place. Derek went on to say “I kind of always felt ashamed of myself, because I was different than everybody else, but then attending The University and now being a senior, I feel more open about who I am as a person.” That sense of connection, purpose, freedom, and like-mindedness rang true for those who attributed groups on campus for their

feeling of comfortability and inclusion on The University campus. A specific group that is housed in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and one frequently mentioned is Men of Excellence.

Men of Excellence

Men of Excellence is committed to providing a space that strengthens the bonds between men, create a network between the students, staff, faculty and alumni of color, develop leaders, improve communication and collaboration and to strengthen values and self-esteem. The benefits of being affiliated with this group is not only the social support by way of bi-weekly meetings that involved dialogue surrounding current events impacting black males, there is also academic support with regular grade checks and tutoring options. This group was referenced by several of the participants as a place where they sought refuge and community. When asked why he joined Men of Excellence, Gary responded by saying “What convinced me to join was just the brotherhood.” The idea of coming together with a group of individuals who can all bond over being a Black man navigating a White campus, provided them the opportunity to share, learn, and grow from one another. James also wanted a place and space to grow and specifically stated his reason for joining was “to be a better man.” This group provided the young men who came with the opportunity to build each other up and to uplift one another in their moments of insecurity not only in society but on the campus. As an individual who was not a part of any other organization or group, Dustin stated he chose Men of Excellence because “I needed to do something to feel a bit more connected to campus.” Having transferred and not wanting to join a group without being intentional, the Men of Excellence group helped Dustin to acclimate quickly and to feel a sense of connectedness to a group of men that welcomed him with open arms.

Several participants noted the positive impact they had over the years due to Men of Excellence. Mark, who is now a junior shared the value of the program,

When I joined my freshman year, I was just kind of shy, you know, I didn't talk much. Then just to see the progression that I've had because of Men of Excellence... I became more confident, more outspoken, it steered me the right direction of, you know, just embracing the fact that, I'm Black man in America and I'm proud of being a Black man in America.

Mark displayed his appreciation to Men of Excellence for contributing to him seeing the value in who is and realizing that he is never truly alone during his journey through academia. Even though each of these men were in different academic programs and colleges they all came together and Men of Excellence provided them with stability through unity.

Greek Life

Several of the young men gave credit to the Greek Life on the campus which fostered a sense of brotherhood, and ultimately provided them another space where they could feel united and comfortable in their skin. Since 1930, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) has served as a premier organization for African-American fraternities and sororities. The NPHC was founded at Howard University to support Black college students who were searching for a voice, community, and shared identity as they pursued their education. The NPHC currently has nine members and these Greek organizations are commonly referred to as "The Divine Nine." At the University, four of the Divine Nine are active as Fraternities, meanwhile the other five are Sororities. Many of the men interviewed were either part of Alpha Phi Alpha or Kappa Alpha Psi fraternities. Chad recalled how his fraternity made him feel connected, valued, and comfortable on campus. He shared "It just gives you more opportunity to build that connection, build that

sense of unity, partnerships, programming events, different initiatives, and collaborate together. So eventually, all those working together gave me a sense of community.” Whether considered a necessity or not, the search for community (i.e., social support) seemed to be instrumental for these men to join a Black fraternity. Cody stated, “Being a member of Kappa Alpha Psi made me completely feel comfortable on this campus, itself.” The participants also appreciated the moments where they could come together with other Black males and be unapologetic about their culture.

Black Student Union

Another campus group these young men consistently acknowledged as a safe space was the Black Student Union (BSU). The goal of BSU is to be a positive and productive representation of the African-American community on and off the University campus. The word that stuck out the most about BSU was that of community. Oliver expressed “Black Student Union is the backbone of the Black community on campus so if I wanted to be a part of the Black experience, I would have to be part of the Black Student Union.” Being part of what many referred to as the “Black experience,” BSU is a space where Black students can share cultural experiences (music, food, slang, etc.) and not feel the need to explain their culture. Clinton acknowledged the familial feeling of BSU when he stated, “you feel confident that you can let loose, it's like you're at your grandma's house, and you can just do whatever you want with all your cousins and your first second, third cousins, you can just be free.” Many of the men stated having an environment that was safe allowed them an opportunity to be more engaged within the campus community in general. Brad noted the impact that BSU had on him, coming from a high school where he mostly interacted with white kids,

Just learning more, and being more socially active with people who are more like me, because in high school, and honors classes, stuff like that, we had mainly just white kids, we didn't really have a whole lot of Black kids, so I didn't get a chance to make a whole lot of Black friends. But now I do have more people who look like me.

Brad's ability to be around other Black people allowed him to open up and be more engaged on campus and increased his self-efficacy. When asked about how increased campus engagement positively impacted him, Brad stated,

I would say, since I got more socially involved on campus, I have noticed that literally, like, my grades and the resources and people who I reached out to, they had increased.

I'm going to be honest with you, my GPA, freshman year wasn't the best. Now after I got involved in different things, and started getting around people who have been through similar situations...by the end of sophomore year, I had a 4.0 GPA.

For Brad to thrive academically through his social engagement was eye opening and speaks to the importance of multiple layers of support. Within conversations with these young men, the reoccurring theme of representation, many of the men felt that connecting to leaders in various roles on campus was a contributing factor to their level of comfort.

Black Faculty/Staff

Several participants identified faculty and staff who had a positive impact on them during their time at the University. The positive impact was in response to Black faculty and staff members allowing these young men to know they had an ally and an advocate on campus. Oliver acknowledged a particular staff member who supported him. He said, "The fact that she is a Black staff member and she's right there readily available, you know, for students that was, something that I really enjoyed." It seemed as if in a place where the men often felt alone, they

longed for something that felt familiar. This familiarity of home, several of the young men connected to those who stepped in and filled in the role of a parent or mentor. Brad recalled an interaction with a particular administrator he met within his first few weeks on campus who became a surrogate mother to him,

She had basically just given me the same message that you know, my mom and grandma had then given me, “You are a Black male, you guys have to hold yourself up, and work hard.” And honestly, I just fell in love with that. I was like, okay, they do have Black faculty and staff who are here to help.

After that interaction Brad felt he had someone to support him, which eased any reservations he may have had about not being successful academically or socially. The accountability and structure these mentors provided seemed to be of high value to the participants. Mark also had a positive exchange with a Black professor in Sociology that impacted him greatly. Brad is now a junior, and looking back on his freshman year he recalled, “The information that I’ve learned from that course continues to stick with me to this day.” Not only did he feel the course was of value but the relationship and the perceived level of acknowledgement from the professor was even greater. He went on to share,

When I see that Professor, we can always reconnect, they always ask me, how am I doing? How’s life? Any of my other professors that I’ve seen, like, that aren’t Black and I see out in public, they tend to not recognize me as much.

The connection inside the classroom translates to the connection outside of the classroom, and the obvious attention to his well-being by that professor gave him encouragement to persist. Brad continued by saying “It’s just amazing to see Black professors invest in me. Ultimately, they want to see me graduate, they want to see me be successful in life, and that’s just an amazing

feeling.” During his time at The University Brad has struggled with feelings of loneliness, and that Professor helped eased some of those feelings, “Having the Black professor showed me that I wasn't alone.” Knowing that he had someone he could look to in those moments brought Brad great relief. It was noticeable these men felt their Black Professors and Staff had a greater understanding of the challenges, barriers, and how the identity of a Black men impacts them regularly. In a day and age where young men often feel judged and must defend themselves, being able to let down their walls and to feel safe in their identity was something that Black faculty and staff were able to provide. Clarence shared a common sentiment when discussing a class, he had with a Black professor who truly cared about him,

Everything they said is something that I could relate to. It was, it was incredible. It was a different experience. I felt comfortable in that space...I had to be paying attention, I couldn't fall asleep, she would get on me... She would ask to see my midterm grade... She cared, which I loved.

Clarence appreciated the accountability and the fact he felt the accountability was coming from a place of good intentions and a place of support. He felt valued because she wanted him to be successful not only in the classroom but in life as well. Similar to Oliver, Brad, and Mark, Clarence reiterated the importance of feeling supported and cared about from those considered leaders on campus. There was something these young men treasured about knowing should they stumble there was someone on the campus they respected who would be there to help them regain their footing. Andrew stated he has not had many Black Professors, and as a senior that is something he wishes he would have had more of, “I believe we need more Black Professors, for the simple fact of diversity and to add to the culture of color on the campus. There needs to be more of us that represent for our people.” The psychological consequences of lack of

representation in the classroom was vivid when Nick stated, “when I walk into an all-white classroom, I have this feeling that the professors and all the students automatically make 20 assumptions about me. Maybe I'm lazy, I'm unmotivated, not smart.” The lack of representation also weighed heavy on Wesley and caused him to question the role he will play as an educator.

The lack of Black Professors I've had discourages me from my profession.... not seeing a good representation of African-American teachers ...will I be able to connect with students and other professionals? How will the dynamic be? Like, how will I be able to be a good coworker? If I can't even relate to anything that they're saying?”

Representation goes beyond the classroom, as the importance of faculty and staff of color also factors into the role these men play in society. To each of the participants it was clear that representation (seeing yourself or someone like you) in front of the classroom or in positions of power was something they each had thought about at some point. For some it was crucial whereas for others it was not. However, it was still a topic that proved to be relevant.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

This study was designed to uncover and understand the perceptions of Black Males at a PWI. PWIs have elevated diversity as a priority and are steadily trying to identify ways to grow that population on their campuses (Dumas-Hines et al., 2001). This study focused on the following three research questions.

1. Why did Black male students choose to attend a PWI?
2. How do Black males' experiences at the institution compare to their expectations?
3. How do Black male students make sense of their identity while adapting to a PWI?

While answering these questions I was able to gather the impact and implications on the Black males' identity and the ways they have navigated and continue to navigate during their collegiate experience. This chapter presents the conclusions and implications of the study

Conclusions

In this section, conclusions will be discussed based on the themes addressed using data collected from the findings outlined in the previous chapter. Each of the themes that were previously discussed helps to inform the discussion utilizing the established frameworks of Surprise and Sensemaking (Louis, 1980) and Black Identity Theory (Cross, 1971).

Raised in a Culture of Stress Prior to Entering The University

The Black male experience is complex and layered and the ways in which these men navigate in a white world have been learned from a very early age. Society plays a major role in the stress that African-American males endure daily, from police brutality, being labeled as thugs, and often seen as uneducated just to name a few (Jenkins, 2006). People of Color, in

general, believe that the proverbial societal "deck is stacked against them." An old African-American proverb suggests that "You've got to work twice as hard to get half as far," as a Black person in White America (Gordon et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2011). Like many Black males, the participants were raised in a culture of stress prior to arriving on the college campus. The impacts those stressors had on the African-American male's perceived abilities, strategies on how they would navigate the world, and the perception of how others would view them proved to be significant. While over time Black culture (music, movies and fashion) has become widely accepted and prominent Black figures have helped rewrite many Black stereotypes (e.g., Oprah, Barack Obama, Michael Jordan), racial tensions are still at an all-time high as seen by recent events (George Floyd's public death at the hands of a white police officer, ensuing Black Lives Matter protests, and Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during the national anthem). The men in this study are grappling more with where do they fall on the spectrum of acceptance within society in addition to what can they can give back to the same society that so often tears them down.

The participants acknowledged and confirmed the mindset of "us" against "them" which was established in their lives well before entering the institution. This mentality was constructed by way of their upbringing, lessons from their families, and prior childhood experiences, including their neighborhood and schools attended. These men were equipped with tactics of survival and literally how to fight for their lives. Additionally, early on these men were conditioned to cope with the possibility and likelihood of being feared just for the color of their skin, judged on their abilities because of the way they dressed. These examples alone more than adequately prepared the men to navigate whatever surprise was thrown their way. Due to the abundance of preparation, these men encountered very few surprises upon arrival and during their time at the University. With a few exceptions most of the men came into the University

fully prepared for interfacing with a PWI, which led them to seek safe spaces that would provide them the support they would need during their academic career.

Thus, to manage and help alleviate their stress, most of the young men intentionally sought Black spaces on campus such as BSU, Black Greek life, and Office of Diversity and Inclusion. These places provided safe spaces for these young men to feel connected and more importantly a place to feel accepted. Research has confirmed that participation in same-race organizations does not increase isolation for African-American and other minority students, as some may believe, but made them feel more a part of the campus community (Harper, 2007). These safe spaces have been primarily initiated by folks of color on the campus who identify with the need for Black males to feel safe. The participants in this study felt that the University established these spaces specifically for them to feel comfortable and in the eyes of the students, this has made them feel gratitude towards the institution. Literature new and old, acknowledges that regardless of the environment (academia, industry) or the institution (PWI, HBCU) Black males will navigate to spaces within that environment and institution to people they can trust, which is often those that look like them (Brooms, 2018b; Jones, 2020; Moran et al., 1994; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). Conversely, navigating to these spaces of color will often solidify implicit and often explicit messages they have learned revolving around being careful about how they navigate when in predominantly White spaces.

Making Sense of It All

To examine the expectation, experiences, and impact of being a Black male at a PWI, I used Louis' (1980) theory of surprise and sensemaking and Cross' theory (1971) of Black identity. These theories help to highlight and elevate the voices of these 19 Black males who found ways to navigate at a PWI. According to Louis (1980), anticipations are tested against the

reality of new experiences. Differences between anticipations and experiences become apparent and contribute to potential reality shock. Coping with such differences and "learning the ropes" of the new setting typically occupy the newcomer mentally emotionally. According to Cross (1971), Black identity is emerging, changing, and complex. Black identity can be affected by socioeconomic status, situational context, family and friends. The participants in this study demonstrated the many ways their expectations were affirmed or contradicted and ultimately the impact those expectations had on how they viewed themselves.

Surprise and Sensemaking

This framework considers the expectations newcomers bring to a new organizational context, in addition to five types of surprises (conscious expectations, self-expectations, unanticipated features, internal reactions, and cultural assumptions) (Louis, 1980). I address how few of the participants encountered any of the five types of surprises due to their expectations, for the most part, being consistent with their experiences. Most of the participants had a clear understanding of what to expect at The University whether from a campus visit prior to enrolling, family who attended, previous experiences from K-12, or just their own assumptions. The following sections will unpack their experiences in greater detail.

Conscious Expectations

When evaluating "surprise," the first type arises when *conscious expectations* about college are unmet. All of the participants entered the environment fully aware that the University was over 50% white, therefore their expectation was confirmed when they arrived and most of them did not experience a sense of surprise. Although there was hardly any level of conscious expectation, the men in this study found that the University often promoted, uplifted, and showcased safe spaces for Black men (Greek Life, BSU, ODI). Many of the men were made

aware of these spaces from the very first day on campus and in some instances before they entered the campus environment. As these men were made aware of these spaces the seed of diversity was often planted, raised their expectations accordingly, and ultimately set these men up for disappointment. This disappointment came from the realization that they had to take the initiative to find these spaces to be nurtured, connect, and grow. There were a couple of participants who noticeably encountered a conscious expectation, Oliver and Clinton had an expectation there would be a strong culture of diversity based on things they were told by staff or faculty prior to attending the University. Additionally, there was a level of frustration that came from their own assumptions. The assumption that a University located in an urban area would provide opportunities to engage with many Black students and more specifically Black males proved to be untrue. Ultimately the major contributor to the surprise was the feeling of being deceived by the University regarding the diversity on campus. Given that diversity and inclusion initiatives on the campus of PWIs have been created to improve the campus climate, the intention may be pure but ultimately these young men are left to combat the remnants of the unintentional surprise (Lewis & Shah, 2019).

Self-expectations

The second form of surprise is that of *self-expectations*. This form of surprise is characterized by the student's self-assessment of skills, values, and needs, when performance expectations of self or the transferability of one's skills from a previous environment to a new setting are unmet (Harper & Newman, 2016). This form of surprise was met, due to most of the participants being raised in environments that provided them with the skills they would need to navigate in "White America." Ambition, drive, perseverance, and determination were many of the skills and personal strengths alluded to by the men. Jim was an exception to this surprise, as

he came from a predominantly Black environment and shared that he felt initial feelings of loneliness and lack of motivation when trying to adapt to a predominantly White space. Jim, who is now a senior, was able to adapt by finding security within the organizations and groups on campus which helped reaffirm the skills that he entered the institution with. Jim, like many Black males who did not grow up in spaces with many White individuals, often experience culture shock when they enter an environment that is primarily White. Although the environment was not a surprise, the unexpected emotional reaction often is. Emotions are unpredictable and often unacceptable within the Black male culture. Being strong, tough, and “hard” are often promoted to Black males at an early age which can contribute to the struggle of processing environmental surprises (Dancy, 2014b). In order to process this surprise Jim, like many of the other males, sought social connections to the Black community which ultimately served as a safeguard (McDonald & Vrana, 2007). More than half the participants gravitated to support groups like Men of Excellence, a space to feel better connected and to fellowship with like-minded individuals. This was seen by the positive responses Gary and Vincent had when recalling memorable experiences or the reasons they have thrived socially and academically during their time at the University. For these individuals adjusting to a setting in which they are the minority, the importance of being around those who are similar proved to be of value (Chavous et al., 2002).

Unanticipated Features

The third type of surprise is encountered when unconscious or *unanticipated features* of the experience are unmet. This type of surprise can be seen when thoughts previously not considered important in the experience emerge and become important to the student (Warner & Brown, 1995). Some of the men experienced this surprise and some did not. Several participants

like James, Vincent, and Zane felt that benefits offered by the institution (scholarships, academic programs and location) ultimately outweighed the fact that the University was a PWI. For many of these men the value of the education they would receive was ranked high. Education is often encouraged in Black households, as many Black males are often first generation and obtaining a degree is a way to not only achieve success but to set an example for younger generations and to make older generations proud (Hébert, 2018). Therefore, taking advantage of opportunities that will help achieve degree completion was a large motivator for several of the participants. With this information being well known, PWI's have made deliberate efforts to enhance the Black student experience by way of programs, targeted scholarships, and in-state tuition incentives for designated urban cities. These options provide value to Black male students seeking additional opportunities to enhance their academic career (Jones et al., 2019). Many of the participants had positive experiences at the PWI, however, their experiences were not related to what initially drew them to enroll in the institution (scholarships, academic programs and location), therefore the unrelated experiences became an unanticipated feature. Engagement with the ODI unexpectedly contributed to the positive experiences at the University for participants like Nick and Chad. The ODI provides a safe space that allows Black students to congregate, share ideas, network, and support each other. Such environments are vital to the social well-being of Black males and have shown to contribute to them successfully navigating on campus (Ferguson, 2020). The contributing factors of why they chose to attend the institution in the first place still proved to be important, however, the personal connections they made have since superseded those factors. Those personal connections are what have contributed largely to their persistence.

Internal Reactions

The fourth form of surprise is *internal reactions* to a new experience (Warner & Brown, 1995). How the new experience feels, as opposed to how the individual expected it to feel, is difficult to anticipate and often a surprise. Although these young men understood they would be attending a PWI, many of them still struggled initially with the lack of Black faculty and staff representation. Family was a major factor in the lives of many of the participants, which contributed to the importance of feeling a sense of “home” even on campus. That sense of home is often associated with a parental figure. Those who engaged with Black faculty and staff received long-lasting impressions, and those relationships proved to be more impactful than their relationships with other White faculty (Umbach, 2006). Additionally, the student-centric Black spaces are often facilitated by faculty or staff of color. This often contributes to positive student satisfaction at the institution and the overall college experience for the student. Black professors have been and remain essential institutional agents that play a strong role in promoting student success, especially for minoritized students (Fries-Britt & White-Lewis, 2020). Interactions between Black faculty and students can have a positive impact on students’ academic and personal success (Tuitt, 2012). Participants like Clarence and Mark have been able to connect with Black faculty members that helped them navigate the internal reactions contributing to their surprise. It was noticed that Black faculty members provided academic guidance and career advice, and while those were important, the participants acknowledged other components such as nurturing, mothering, and culturally relevant counsel roles. The participants also deemed trust to be an important function of the important relationships that helped them process their internal reactions (Patton & Harper, 2003). Strong relationships with faculty are crucial to student

success at college. Faculty/student relationships are strongly and positively correlated with student satisfaction with college (Astin, 1996).

Cultural Assumptions

The fifth form of surprise occurs from *cultural assumptions* the student makes (Warner & Brown, 1995). Specifically, cultural assumptions derived from previous experiences may provide inappropriate operating guidelines in the context of the new experiences. Most participants did not experience a mismatch with cultural assumptions. Participants like Oliver, Frank, James, and Sean came from diverse cities, attended racially diverse high schools, and those experiences contributed to their assumptions of how they would adjust to college. These same participants shared they expected to work twice as hard as their white counterparts. Equally, participants like Frank and Dustin had pre-existing expectations and came into the institution with their guards up. Although this messaging has taught the men how to be resilient, indirectly it has also taught the men to feel as if they are not good enough as they are. True or not this messaging can exacerbate this feeling of surprise due to the fact that some Black men internalize such beliefs which, in turn, become self-fulfilling, self-defeating, and self-threatening (Steele, 2000). These men have worked tirelessly to adjust to their environment, meanwhile combatting internal (self-doubt) and external (society) messaging that has caused them to be even more aware of their blackness. Participants like Cody and Chad made sense of this surprise by connecting with Greek Life and finding positive, affirming relationships to help promote and uplift positive emotional and cultural experiences within the Black community on campus. While unpacking the experiences of these men, regardless of any met or unmet expectations they all made sense of their experiences utilizing their race as their primary lens of focus.

Black Identity

A major element of this study was that of Black identity. Black identity, defined as an individual's personal characteristics shared across gender, race, ethnicity, and culture and the cultural norms that connect groups of people. Cross (1971) believed that black identity development and change occur through socialization. Socialization contributes to identity formation through four linear stages of development (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). As a Black student navigates through their collegiate career, awareness of Black identity becomes elevated and heightened (Cross Jr, 1971). Cross elaborated four stages of Black identity: (a) pre-encounter, (b) encounter, (c) immersion and (d) internalization. Most of these stages were seen in how the men have successfully adapted and navigated their current environment. In order for Black males to thrive in White spaces they must participate in predominantly White educational and occupational settings while retaining a connection to African-American culture (Diemer, 2007; Radwanski, 2019). Although this theory was developed in the 1970's, it is still relevant today as these men have been adapting all their lives and will continue to for the rest of their lives. While this theory is seen as a linear process, I found that was not necessarily the case and that the stage these men were in was often a reflection of their lived experiences and how they were able to process those lived experiences.

Pre-encounter

In the pre-encounter stage, a person thinks of the world as the opposite of Black. An example would be a Black male student thinking he does not have to assimilate or play down his "blackness" to fit in on a white campus. Individuals in the pre-encounter stage exhibit low salience attitudes toward race and see it as having a physical and insignificant role in their everyday lives (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). There are some Black people for whom being Black

is very important, and there are some Black people who can hold an extreme attitude of anti-Blackness (Ritchey, 2014). This stage is most commonly seen with Black males who are either biracial or grew up in a multi-racial home. The challenges of being Black but not having ethnic features commonly associated with being Black (coarse hair, darker skin) can present its challenges. Not fitting in groups of White people because you do not look “white” and not fitting in with Black people because you do not “act” Black are relevant feelings that can influence one’s identity as alluded to by Derek, the study participant who identified as bi-racial. As for most of the men in this study, being Black was significant and everything pertaining to their “blackness” was relevant to them. Black men are often encouraged to be proud of who they are, acknowledge their ancestors, and to defy the stereotypes, so entering any White environment leading with that pride and self-confidence often serves as a protective shield (Kafele, 2009). During their time at the University the feeling of being the “only one,” was not only a feeling but a reality. In many of their classrooms and in other common spaces at the institution there was minimal representation of other Black students, faculty, and staff which put a spotlight on them being the minority. This feeling is what pushed the participants to constantly seek out opportunities or organizations where they could feel connected to a Black experience. For many of the men, their race was a prominent factor in how they experienced the University environment, the spaces that these men felt comfortable were specifically designed for Black males, that alone put their race front and center. Prior to entering the University, most of the participants believed their race would be a factor by way of their upbringing. The reminders from their families about being a Black male and the stressors attached with that identity, made it almost impossible for the men to not be conscious of “who” they are (Black men).

Encounter

During the encounter stage, a person experiences an incident or dissonance of some sort that awakens consciousness of their race (Vandiver et al., 2001). An example would be when the Black student feels hyper-aware of his blackness and becomes obsessed with all levels of engagement (speaking, walking, mannerisms). Once again, this idea of being “hyperaware” was established prior to coming to the University. However, those who came from more diverse backgrounds like Andrew and Clinton felt an elevated sense of awareness and even those who came from multi-racial backgrounds like Derek who was used to blending in easily in White spaces found acclimating to a campus he perceived as diverse to be a challenge. The encounter stage can be marked by events, circumstances, and small encounters that have a cumulative effect of pushing the individual toward an increased understanding of his or her racial heritage (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). Also, during the encounter stage, an event happens that shapes how one views their race. Most importantly this stage has a personally significant impact to be the catalyst to spur change in one’s thinking (Ritchey, 2014). A significant impact was specifically lack of representation of faculty, as many participants did not realize how the lack of Black faculty would impact them until they had the opportunity to have meaningful interactions with a Black faculty member (Oliver, Brad and Clarence). For many of the men, their experiences on campus both positive (finding a sense of community) and negative (lack of representation), have allowed them to address their identity in a way they had not before. The reality that the campus community is very much an accurate depiction of many of the fields (nursing, STEM, music education) many of these men will be entering post-graduation, has served as quite the teachable moment. During their time at The University, many of the men have utilized the life lessons and skills (drive, persistence, and determination) instilled by their families. No matter where they are

on their collegiate journey, the participants have found strength in their identity. Their on-campus support systems play a critical role in allowing them to feel more than capable in their abilities to not only stay but to thrive at the institution.

Immersion

Immersion is when everything of value must be Black; this stage specifically addresses absorption into the world of blackness (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). Harper and Quaye (2007) noted that many racial and ethnic minority students find themselves either subverting their identity to become involved in the mainstream culture or assimilating as they struggle to maintain a strong cultural connection to their racial identity (Ritchey, 2014). Often times, men of color are conditioned to “not sell out” or to not become “tokenized,” therefore Black males will intentionally seek places that will help them stay rooted and grounded in their culture (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014). This was seen in many of the participants, Black affiliated student organizations proved to be the most impactful and consistent level of support that most of these men had at The University. These environments proved to be necessary for the men to have a sense of comfort and the ability to connect and relate to others with similar experiences. The impact on their identity was positive, and these places provided them safety and security within themselves and the campus community.

Internalization

Internalization is the final stage; in this stage it is possible to focus on things other than one’s racial group. These men have been groomed to endure hardships and struggles, so it was not likely for them to focus on anything other than their racial group. This group of Black males are part of a small population (when compared to their white peers) that will obtain college degrees, and they are often reminded of this by their families, the institution, and society (Boyd,

2017). With those constant reminders it is hard to internalize anything about their identity and or where they fall within the racial group. During the internalization stage, individuals work to achieve dissonance resolution and inner peace through acceptance of and pride in their race (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). In White environments, Black men are often forced to think critically about their racial identity and how it has shaped their life. As a result they embrace what it means to be Black and have Black self-love they exude into the universe and to those around them (Ritchey, 2014). Internalization was seen more often than not in the fact that many of these young men did not complain or talk negatively about the University, none of them felt the need to drop out or transfer. While at the University these men have embraced their blackness and continue to yearn for the opportunities to be in places and spaces where they can make their families and communities proud. These students overall were highly engaged inside (NSBE) and outside (Men of Excellence) of their colleges, in addition to being prestigious scholarship recipients (Chris and Chad), and five of whom are set to graduate Spring 2021. These men have proven to be resilient and have risen to the occasion even when society and the “system” of higher education has bet against them. Their tenacity and willpower can hopefully serve as a testament to others. While PWIs do present challenges, barriers and sometimes obstacles, these are not profound enough to prevent Black men from accomplishing their goals.

Implications for Practice

The findings and conclusions of this study led to the identification of several implications for PWIs to consider when developing efforts to recruit and retain Black men. The importance of authentic safe spaces and people and the need to reconsider diversity efforts will be discussed in this section.

Authentic Safe Black Spaces and People are Important

The importance of safe spaces and Black faculty and staff can not be emphasized enough. Programs that are centered on Black males and the Black experience proved to be of value, however, also proved to add a level dissatisfaction to their college experience. Although the PWI may mean well when establishing programs for these Black males, they are often unaware of the false narrative that is perceived by the men when coming to the campus. The key factor is making sure there is genuine intentionality and diversity of thought at the table when designing these programs. These programs are the lifeline to these males feeling a sense of connection and fostering a sense of belonging (Miller & Bryan, 2020).

In addition to safe spaces, the impact of Black faculty and staff was also significant. Faculty and staff helped established meaningful relationships and a level of comfortability that resembles a familiar family feeling. It is important that faculty and staff are aware of the impact they are having on these young men, in addition to PWIs making it a priority in hiring practices to ensure Black students continue to have opportunities to establish these meaningful relationships. Ensuring that faculty and staff know the impact they can have on helping students feel a sense of belonging may encourage the faculty to be more engaged at their institution beyond just the classroom (Stanley, 2006; Strayhorn, 2017, 2018; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Creating an opportunity or structure where Black faculty and staff are made visible to the Black males so that these young men are aware that they are not alone may prove to be beneficial. Students spend most of their time inside their classrooms and with the lack of Black faculty in the classroom the disconnect can prove to be problematic over time.

PWIs Should Reconsider Their Diversity Efforts

PWI's might reconsider their diversity efforts to ensure they are diverse in offerings and that they are actually meeting the needs of students who are highly engaged and those who are not. There are many Black men who are not as engaged as the men in this study, and in order for their needs to be met, additional thought should be given to how to reach that population. As research shows those who are often high achieving (high GPA) and those who are considered high need (financially or behaviorally) have many options for services and opportunities and are often the main priority. However, students who are in the middle are at a disadvantaged and are often overlooked, which in turn becomes a barrier for that group of students (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). Goals of increased diversity are important however, to better understand what services can be improved, not only in Student Affairs but also in Academic Affairs, crucial conversations must be had with the students these programs are being created for. It has been stated that Black males need nurturing to help them adjust and to adapt (Parker et al., 2016), however, that often falls outside of the scope of practice for academic units. For Black males to truly be supported, a more holistic approach with a focus on social and academic support, in and outside of their academic units can ultimately have a broader reach. As seen in by the participants in this study, several of whom were finding ways to feel connected outside of their academic programs. Men of Excellence being a prime example of a high impact program that offers both social and academic support. A related implication is the Black Identity theory, applied in higher education research. Allowing Black men to navigate their experiences freely, in conjunction with providing the institutional supports proven to aid their success, may create more opportunities for Black men to foster a sense of belonging; this sense of belonging would, in turn, greatly increase the chances that they would not only be retained and graduate but also to be very successful

academically and socially in the process (Radwanski, 2019; Strayhorn, 2018). PWIs that state they value diversity should take into consideration the implicit and explicit messaging being communicated (Wilson et al., 2012). When actively promoting diversity, incoming students often create an image in their minds of what a diverse environment looks like, when that “image” is not confirmed, the students suffer. Although this may not be an intentional act, being mindful of how the university presents itself as it is and not how it wants to be will provide the student a clearer picture of what they can expect and limit their surprise.

Implications for Policy

The system of higher education tends to struggle to meet the needs of Black students and even more so Black males. For the institution to be on one accord, it should develop a shared definition of diversity and include it in a clearly articulated mission, vision, or established goals. Aligning diversity strongly with the institution’s mission, vision or established goals is a foundation on which to begin to foster a culture of diversity (Smith, 2009).

Culture of Higher Education

The culture of higher education can often be decentralized and siloed, which can lead to academic colleges struggling to specifically serve the needs of their Black males. Currently, in higher education there is a trend is to look to an institution’s Chief Diversity Officer, Vice President for Diversity and Equity or The Director of Diversity and Inclusion (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Instead, colleges and universities should view the position as an equal partner effort or approach with a collaborative mindset. Leaders across the institution, at all ranks, levels and classifications, should collaborate with institutional leaders, including the CDO/VP/Director, to develop and communicate a strategic plan that will allow other leaders and their teams to operationalize and execute the vision. Institutions must work intentionally to

engage constituents from across campus and within the community and link diversity capacity building efforts to the specific roles, work, and tasks of the individuals. This will provide a comprehensive approach that will allow the student voice to be heard, specifically the voices of the Black males students and provide insight regarding how their identities intersect with the system of education (Stewart, 2002). As seen in the research and from the participants in this study, Black males are highly aware of their identity prior to entering the system and often times the system heightens that awareness due to the men feeling isolated and unheard (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strayhorn, 2018). Furthermore, there must be a high impact communication strategy in place to keep the university community up-to-date of ways that Black males are being impacted within higher education including identity, social justice related issues and other policies that can influence their recruitment, retention and sense of belonging. It is also in the best interest of the institution to make sure these students are thriving and not just surviving, that is ultimately the best form of recruitment and retention.

A Shared Approach

Everyone that is part of the campus community has a responsibility to uphold the mission, vision and goals that include diversity and inclusive excellence. Additionally, all stakeholders must be held accountable for policies and practices that reflect the ever-evolving landscape of higher education. Resource allocation is crucial and reflect the institutions priorities and values, thus proper funding should be allocated to spaces and places that will support Black males at the institution. Black males thrive when they feel like they belong to an institution, they also thrive when there is ownership in the spaces, they find safety in. Allowing these students to have a stronger presence in the spaces that have been created for them on these White campuses can foster an even deeper sense of connection to the institution. White institutions and higher

education in general can benefit by listening and hearing from the voices of these men, to truly uplift and acknowledge diversity, issues surrounding diversity must be addressed head on. As previously mentioned, Black males are in a constant psychological and social emotional tug-of-war, often at the hands of society and the “system” itself (Harper, 2007). Therefore, there needs to be priority placed on having opportunities for those with diversity of thought, those who identify with the experiences of these Black males, those who want to be part of the change, those willing to acknowledge the system and those willing to rewrite the system to all come together to apply constant pressure to the institution itself. This pressure will hopefully establish accountability on the values, mission and vision of the institution.

Although strides have been made and barriers for Black males are not as high as they used to be, with the ever-changing landscaping within higher education and the stronger emphasis on diversity things are slowly moving in the right direction. Universities are making a valiant effort to ensure Black males have access to educational opportunities, in addition to establishing that Black males have levels of support prior to entering the University and once they arrive (Brooms, 2018b; Knaggs et al., 2015). As identified in research and in this study, students are often leaning on faculty and staff of color for continued support (McClure, 2006; Mobley Jr & Johnson, 2019). For the system to continue changing for the better the onus can not be only on faculty and staff of color, having allies who do not share a similar identity and that will advocate for Black males on, and off campus is crucial to the success of these men in higher education.

Implications for Future Research

This study occurred at a public, research institution and consisted of 19 Black men and their lived experiences. A larger qualitative study could be undertaken to gain a broader range of

experiences and voices. Additionally, this type of research could focus on specific groups of Black male students. For instance, examining first-time freshmen only, comparing transfer students to students who have only attended the University, examining Black male student athletes or looking at upper classmen (junior and seniors) vs freshman and sophomore experiences, comparing academic major, all of which may yield different results and data.

Another direction of further research would be to have multiple focus groups based on the themes of the research. Having focus groups with specific discussion topics and questions centered on the different themes that emerged in the present study could yield more specific data about students' experiences. Also, utilizing surveys, or climate studies with an emphasis on diversity could be used to provide more wide-ranging data on the overall student experience at the institution.

Furthermore, the setting of the institution could be adjusted to consider a private institution, with a smaller or larger population. Private institutions, depending on their mission and size, may provide more or fewer resources for students to create a sense of belonging. Also, considering the mission of other public institutions, such as a Liberal Arts institutions or even HBCUs, may lead to new and different results. Throughout this study, the majors of the students were not a significant concern. However, STEM did come up in the research, specifically that of Engineering as a program that drew many of the participants to the institution. Taking a deeper look into different STEM majors could also change the data and provide different experiences and contexts for institutions, especially PWIs, to improve their services and retention efforts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

African-American Male Student Perceptions of Adaptation, and Identity Screening Survey

Q1 Are you a US citizen?

- Yes
- No

Q2 Do you identify as African-American (An American of African and especially of Black African descent)?

- Yes
- No

Q3 What is your age?

- 17 years of age or younger
- 18-20
- 21-22
- 23-24
- 24 - older

Q4 Do you live on campus?

- Yes
- No

Q5 What is your status of enrollment?

- Full time (12 or more credit hours)
- Part time (5-11 credit hours)

Q6 Are you involved in any on campus-activities? Are you involved in any on-campus activities (Student Organization, Fraternity, Groups, Clubs, Intramurals...etc)

Yes

No

Q7 If your involved in on campus activities, list all them activities in which you are involved.

Q8 Are you currently a student athlete OR were you recruited to WSU for athletics?

Yes

No

Q9 What is your preferred email address?

Q10 What is your phone number (to receive text messages regarding scheduling an interview time)?

Appendix B

Email Script for Interviews

Dear [NAME],

I am a student in Wichita State University's Educational Leadership doctoral program. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in my dissertation research titled, *African-American Male Students at a Predominantly White Institution: Perceptions of Adaptation, and Identity*. I value your input as a Black male on this campus and think that your experiences will greatly contribute to this study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, would you be available for an interview on [DATE], which will be held virtually. Attached please find a consent form with a brief description of the study.

I appreciate your willingness to consider participating in this study. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Bobby Berry
Educational Leadership Doctoral Student

Appendix C

Study Participation Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study, African-American Male Students at a Predominantly White Institution: Perceptions of Adaptation, and Identity.

Participant Selection: You were selected as a possible participant in this study based on your role as a Black male who is classified as a freshman-senior who is currently enrolled at WSU.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. I plan to conduct one individual interview with each participant.

The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The interviews will be held virtually and digitally recorded for later transcription. After the interview has been transcribed, each interview participant will be given an opportunity to receive a summary of their interview for review. Interview questions are included in this packet.

Discomfort/Risks: During this study, it is expected that the discomfort/risks will be minimal. Participation is voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable with any question, you can feel free to not answer it. You also have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. No identifiable information will be used.

Benefits: As a participant, you will get an opportunity to share or voice any opinions related to identity and adaption of a Black male at a PWI.

Confidentiality: I will make every effort to keep participants' study-related information confidential. Participant names will be kept confidential by replacing names with initials or pseudonyms during transcription. Digital copies of transcriptions and recordings will be secured in password-protected locations available only to me. Any hard-copy items will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet in the WSU CLES office of the faculty advisor.

To make sure the study is done properly and safely, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the WSU study team permission to share information about you with the following groups:

The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;

I plan to report and publish the results of the study. The results of this study will be reported in aggregate. Participant names will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree for them to participate in this study, you are free to have them withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact either me, Bobby Berry at Bobby.berry@wichita.edu or (316) 371-7470, or the principal investigator, Dr. Jean Patterson at jean.patterson@wichita.edu, phone 316-978-6392

If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Printed Name (Participant)

Participant Signature Date

Printed Name of Witness

Witness Signature Date

Appendix D

Wichita State University

African-American Male Students at a Predominantly White Institution: Perceptions of Adaptation, and Identity, through the Lens of Surprise and Sense-making.

Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Start time:

End time:

Name of Interviewee:

Name of Interviewer:

Recording Mechanism

Introduction:

Hello, my name is _____, and I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University. I appreciate your willingness to assist me with my dissertation research by agreeing to be interviewed. I am doing a research study titled *African-American Male Students at a Predominantly White Institution: Perceptions of Adaptation, and Identity, through the Lens of Surprise and Sense-making*. You have been selected to participate in the study because as a Black male student you have unique knowledge which will contribute to the research. I am hoping to learn more about your experiences and perspective on being a Black male at a PWI.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversations. To ensure confidentiality, no names will be used when I report the results of the session. With your permission, I would like to audio/video-record our session so that I will be able to make accurate analysis directly from your comments. The recording of our conversation will be transcribed and for confidentiality, the recording and transcription will be kept in a secure location for the duration of, and after the conclusion of, the study. This session will last no more than 90 minutes. If at anytime you no longer want to participate in this interview, just say so and we will stop.

Interview Questions	Interviewer Observations/Reactions
1. What city were you born and raised?	
2. How long have you attended WSU?	
3. What factored into your decision to attend WSU?	
4. Do you live on campus? What factored into your decision to stay on or off campus and how has that experience been?	
5. Before attending WSU, did you have any expectations of what campus life would be like for you?	
6. How would you rate your experience at WSU thus far, and why? 1 being the worst and 5 being the best	
7. What is it like for you being a Black male on this mostly white campus?	
8. WSU has made a commitment to diversity and enhancing student's experience. What are your thoughts about what they are doing to attain that goal? What are they doing well? What could they do better?	
<p>9. Are you a part of any student organizations/clubs or fraternity?</p> <p>10. What factored into your decision to join that particular organization(s)/club(s) or fraternity?</p> <p>11. Tell me about your experience with that organization.</p>	

<p>12. Where do you feel most comfortable/accepted on this campus?</p> <p>13. What is it about that campus place that helps you feel that way?</p>	
<p>14. Can you recall a time at WSU where you were made aware? of your blackness?</p> <p>15. If so, tell me about that experience</p>	
<p>16. Did that experience impact the way you engage on this campus?</p> <p>If YES, how so?</p> <p>If NO, why not...?</p>	
<p>17. Have you ever considered leaving WSU?</p> <p>If so, why?</p> <p>If not, why?</p>	
<p>18. What makes you stay here at WSU?</p>	
<p>19. What are your thoughts on the number of Black professors on our campus?</p> <p>20. What are your thoughts on the number of Black students on our campus?</p>	
<p>21. What could the university do to make your overall experience better?</p>	
<p>22. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your experience as a Black man on this campus?</p>	

Thank you for your time today. I very much appreciate your contribution to my study on African-American Male Students at a Predominantly White Institution.