He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother: Using Interest Convergence as a Framework to Examine the Experiences of Black Male Students Who Participated in a Black Male Mentoring Program at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest.

A dissertation presented to

the Graduate Faculty of

the University of Southern Indiana

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership
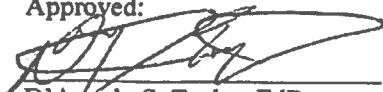

Dameion Doss, Sr.

May 2025

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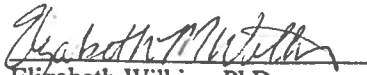
By: Dameion Doss, Sr.

February 2025

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Doctor of Educational Leadership degree.

Approved:

D'Angelo S. Taylor, EdD
Committee Chair

Elizabeth Wilkins, PhD
Committee Member

Stefanie Baker, PhD
Committee Member

_____
(write name on top of line) Director of Doctoral Programs

_____
(write name on top of line) Dean of Graduate Studies

Abstract

This research focuses on understanding how the men who engaged with this study experienced their Predominantly White Institution (PWI) as participants in a Black Male mentoring program. The participants' experiences will be examined through the Interest Convergence (IC) lens. Interest Convergence scholars contend that those who hold systemic power (the dominant group) only implement support measures for Black students and other historically underserved populations when such actions ultimately benefit their position (Bell, 1980). In addition to understanding how the students in this study perceive their campus support through the lens of Interest Convergence, this study sought to understand any impact this mentoring program had on their overall college experience. Researchers on the experiences of Black males primarily focus on deficits and not the value of their experiences. Additionally, there is not enough research done on how the culture of a university campus can highlight and exacerbate deficits which are often used to categorize Black Males on college campuses.

Acknowledgments

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge my committee members who poured into me along this journey. I was blessed with a committee of scholars who contributed to my growth as a researcher and ensured that I did not falter along this journey. To my chair, Dr. D'Angelo Taylor, thank you for believing in me and this work to support young Black men who seek to obtain a college education. Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins, your insight into Interest Convergence was invaluable. Dr. Stefanie Baker, you have been a blessing, thank you for offering the lens of hegemony as this paired perfectly with IC and how these young people navigate their lived experiences at PWIs.

Dedication

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."- African Proverb.

    This dissertation is dedicated to my village. My journey as a first-generation college student was never easy. However, I am thankful my mom, the late Deloise Ann Doss, believed in me and my greatness, even before I believed in myself. I was also fortunate to be the 4th brother in line, as I learned how to navigate certain aspects of life from my older brothers, Matt, David, and Dartanyan. I also stand on the shoulders of my ancestors, as my grandparents and uncle Herbert also saw greatness in me and poured into me, and for that, I am thankful.

    When I met the love of my life and started a family, my desire to expose my children to more and to make this world a better place grew. So, this work is dedicated to the anchors of my village: my mother-in-love, Precious Watt, my beautiful wife, Dr. Khalilah Doss, and my sons, Dameion II and Drake, who are my heart in human form. Without you all, none of this is possible.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Problem of Practice

Significant milestones like the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decisions ending legal segregation, the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibiting educational discrimination, and the 1965 Higher Education Act expanding financial aid access demonstrate measurable progress toward educational equity. However, Harper's (2012) research noted, "Black men's dismal college enrollments, disengagement and underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues in American higher education," (Harper, 2012, pp. 2-3). King's (2016) analysis of systemic inequities reveals a persistent incongruity: while Black college enrollment rates tripled from 1976-2020 (8-24%), degree completion gaps widened - only 17.3% of Black adults held bachelor's degrees in 2022 compared to 41.8% of White peers. Marginalized students face progressive exclusion, from 15:1 college counselor ratio in underfunded high schools to implicit bias in faculty advising that reduces Black STEM persistence by 28% - a pattern King Jr. et al. (2016) identify as structural filtration rather than individual incompetence and failure.

Scholars have also implied that to increase their educational attainment, "the popular one-sided emphasis on failure and low-performing Black male undergraduates must be counterbalanced with insights gathered from those who somehow manage to navigate their way to and through higher education, despite all that is stacked against them," (Harper, 2012, p. 4). One of the ways that this narrative of successful Black Male students is shared is through the examination of mentoring. This qualitative narrative study examines how mentoring has

impacted the college experience of Black male students who attend a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), in the Midwest.

Background

The research around Black Male college students consistently highlights their experiences as problematic and through a deficit lens. There is a group of scholars who argue that even though Black male college students are constantly repositioned in higher education discourse as problems and in crisis, there are success stories. Additionally, there is much to be learned from Black men's engagement in college and the meanings they take from those experiences, (Brooms, 2020, p. 12).

This research focused on understanding how the study participants experienced their campus as Black male mentoring program participants. The participants' experiences will be examined through the Interest Convergence (IC) lens. The Interest Convergence Theory was coined by Bell (1980) on the premise that racial equity initiatives only gain institutional traction when they serve dominant power structures. The theoretical framework was born from Bell's (1980) analysis of *Brown v. Board of Education*, where school desegregation advanced not due to moral awakening, but because it addressed concerns about America's global identity while maintaining white economic control of southern development. As a result, Interest Convergence scholars argue that anything that is done to support Black students or students from any underserved population is done only because doing this ultimately benefits White people or those who have the most power in that system or structure.

There have been continuous conversations about "alternative solutions for selective institutions of higher education to reach beyond their traditional admission measures and identify

diverse students who might otherwise not be selected by traditional admission criteria" (Bial & Rodriguez, 2007, p. 3). However, this approach has not significantly changed the admissions rates for diverse student populations. This, coupled with this population's lower graduation rates, highlights the need for a study like this. In addition to understanding how they perceive their campus support through this lens, this study aims to understand any impact this mentoring program had on their overall college experience.

The research that is done around the experiences of Black male college students focuses on their deficits and not the value of their experiences. Additionally, I argue there is not enough research done on how the culture of a campus can highlight these deficits that are used to categorize Black males on college campuses, even though "this problem [of racism on college campuses] has been magnified over the years, and scholars have implied that a positive racial climate contributes significantly to the social adjustments and academic performance of students in general and especially for students of color, (Brooms, 2017, p. 13). Research suggests that there is also significant concern by scholars who believe that while the research is clear. The demographics gathered support their arguments, Black male college students are still not being supported at the same level as other groups of students (Brooms, 2017, p.15).

Scholars have been vocal in expressing these concerns because they believe that they are "continually mishandled by educators, policymakers, and concerned others" (Harper, 2012, p. 4), and this is a cause for concern. The past fifteen years have witnessed a significant expansion of initiatives - from campus-based retention programs to federal equity grants - to improve Black male collegiate outcomes (Brooms, 2018, p. 18). However, there is still more to be done. The demographic shift in higher education has prompted institutions to implement targeted equity

strategies. Key among efforts to combat attrition rates and close achievement gaps is the creation of Black Male Initiative/Mentoring (BMI) programs - structured programs combining academic support, identity affirming mentorship, and leadership development (Brooms, 2018, p. 20).

This study sought to understand the experiences of Black Males who, through their narratives, participate in a Male Initiative/Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest. This research investigates whether Black males perceive these initiatives as authentic support systems or institutional tools for enrollment management. This study sought to understand this phenomenon, and this desire to seek said understanding is why I have opted to use Interest Convergence as the framework for this study.

Examining the experiences of these students through the framework of Interest Convergence, among other things, gave voice to their experiences while also allowing me the opportunity to explore what has prompted institutions to look to Black Male Initiative/Mentoring (BMI) programs and others that are structured like them, to provide support for this population of students. Additionally, examining this narrative study through an Interest Convergence framework helped me to understand the experiences of these participants better. This examination allowed me to understand better how participating in a male Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest helped or hindered the experiences of Black Males at this institution. Again, this is important because "across institutions, we see various trends: the number of African American students at flagships has declined, more students enroll, and complete degrees at black-serving institutions, and historically black colleges and universities are more racially diverse" (Allen et al., 2018, p. 2).

This qualitative, narrative study was conducted using a purposeful/purposive approach to data collection and Analysis and focused on all aspects of the educational experiences of these students, whether it pertained to academics, social awareness, locating services, or support from the staff and faculty that hold positions at the institution. Documenting the personal experiences of these students also allowed me to analyze the data in a way that helped me understand how mentoring impacted these experiences. Furthermore, mentoring has shaped who these young men are while identifying their feelings about why these programs were created, any gaps in that specific program, and, most importantly, understanding and identifying the areas that the program excelled in and areas they saw as a deficit.

The theoretical framework for this study is Interest Convergence (IC). Before diving into the IC theoretical framework, it is imperative to note that Interest Convergence is rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT as a framework allows researchers to examine the experiences of these students while also centering their voices in the process. Interest Convergence will be explained further in the next section of this document, which will define the theoretical framework in more detail.

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

Interest Convergence was used as the theoretical framework that guided this study. Bell's (1980) Interest Convergence was born out of Critical Race Theory, a perspective formed out of laws passed in the U.S. that focused on the impact of discrimination. Rooted in Bell's (1980) theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT) analyzes the racial power structure through five key tenets: (1) race as a social construct, (2) permanence of racism, (3) Interest Convergence, (4) critique of liberalism, and (5) intersectionality. CRT scholars also argue that

the absence of a conversation around power in any situation where race and underserved groups are being discussed means that we are missing critical components of how privilege and power impact Blacks and other marginalized groups. Critical Race theorists emphasize that Black and indigenous subordination was systemically enforced through the legal enactments of race and property rights - from slave codes valuing human capital to homestead acts privileging white land ownership - widening the wealth gaps (Crenshaw et al., 1996).

To understand the rationale behind the use of Interest Convergence (IC), a tenant of CRT, as the framework for this study, it is essential to highlight the impact that power and privilege have on issues of equality in this country; some scholars argue that the language that is used around CRT and theories that are tenets of CRT are used to maintain white privilege, (Ladson-Billings et al., 1998). Overall, CRT supports the belief that while overt forms of racism were addressed through laws passed in the 1960s, the systems that perpetuated said racism were never restructured. The first step to understanding issues around race in this country is to accept that law aside, everyday racism is still alive and well, and impacts the lives of marginalized people (Lyn et al., 2006).

Critical Race Theory's educational applications, albeit analyzing marginalized students' lived experiences to evaluate equity-focused policies, provide a solid foundation for employing Interest Convergence (Bell, 1980) as this study's analytical lens (Lynn et al., 2006). IC's focus on institutional power structures aligns with CRT's analysis of how race reforms like BMI programs operate within these systems relative to material and symbolic resource allocation.

Using Interest Convergence (IC) as the framework encourages us to look beyond the surface of how blatant racism has been disrupted in this country, because not doing this means

that we overlook the fact that racism is systematic. Nothing has been done to disrupt this system. In addition to this, IC's framework requires that we acknowledge the fact that White people and people in power are not disrupting systematic issues around racism and other issues that impact people in other underrepresented groups because they are friendly, care, or want to; they are doing this because they benefit from this disruption in many ways, and these benefits are not addressed often enough.

Interest Convergence theory asserts the *Brown v. Board* decision (1954) emerged not from a moral compass, but in alignment with war geopolitics as desegregating schools purified America's global image against the Soviet while maintaining socioeconomic hierarchies (Bell, 1980, p. 524). America's systemic pivot served two purposes: addressing international pressure over racial scrutiny and keeping the labor exploitation systems of the Southern white elite. This unspoken benefit that White people or those in power get from disrupting racist/unjust systems is the main takeaway from IC, and using IC as the framework for this study is unique because there has not been much done in the field of higher education to understand the experiences of Black Males in mentoring programs using this as a tenant of CRT.

Research Methods

This qualitative study utilized a constructive narrative approach to gather and analyze the data. This method prioritizes how interpersonal storytelling and racialized institutional logics shape participants' experiences (e.g., BMI program engagement) (Bell, 1980). I focused on the experiences of Black males participating in a Black Male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), Midwestern University. I identified the problem that exists as Black Male students are graduating at lower rates than their White Male counterparts, and even Women

students in general. Based on this, institutions have looked to Black Male Initiative/Mentoring (BMI) programs and others that are structured like them to support this student population. Based on this, institutions have looked to Black male Initiative/Mentoring (BMI) programs and others that are structured like them to support this student population. I sought to understand through the experiences of these participants how these problems showed up on their campus and how they perceived the support or a lack thereof on their campus.

As I mentioned above, I am interested in understanding how the participants of this study experienced their campus as participants of a Black Male Mentoring program. Using IC as the framework and approaching the interviews with the participants through their narratives allowed me to identify the problems that exist, make predictions about how best to support the participants of the study and any future students who participated in the mentoring program on that campus, gather data that aligns with my predictions, and ultimately analyze that data to see if the research questions posed could be answered, (Creswell & Guetterman, 2017).

The narrative inquiry was the best approach to this study, as the participants were willing to share their stories and disclose how their environments have impacted their experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2017, p. 513). Again, I had individual conversations with each of these participants. It is also important to understand multiple types of narrative studies (i.e. interviews, ethnographies, and phenomenological narratives) (Creswell & Guetterman, p. 2017, 515). This study employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, allowing participants to share detailed narratives about their BMI program experiences while maintaining focus on institutional equity dynamics. The approach balanced predetermined themes with flexibility to explore concepts like code-switching fatigue and mentorship oddity.

Research participation requires alignment with study-specific eligibility criteria. To qualify for this study, individuals needed to meet two conditions: (1) identify as Black men, and (2) have participated in a Black Male Mentoring (BMI) program at the Midwestern predominantly white institution under analysis, either currently or in the past. I used a purposive sampling method to select these participants; this means I was already familiar with them and sought their permission to participate in the study. Since I was familiar with their association with the Black Male Mentoring program on their campus, it was conducive to a purposive sampling approach to identifying participants. These participants were purposefully selected based on their alignment with the study's focus on Black male experiences in mentoring programs at a Midwestern PWI. Consistent with purposive sampling methodology, a non-probability approach where researchers intentionally select individuals with specific characteristics relative to the research questions - eligibility criteria included: (1) self-identification as Black men, and (2) current or past participation in the institution's Black Male Mentoring program. This strategy authenticates the validity of the sample concerning systemic barriers and program efficacy.

I identified five Black Male students, who participated in a Black Male Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest. The study engaged two program participants representing academic trajectories: one alumnus who had completed the Mentoring and transitioned from the institution, and one current graduate student actively navigating advanced degree pathways. The other three participants had the following academic classifications, one was a sophomore, one was a junior, and the last participant identified as a

senior. Students not participating in this program will not be considered for inclusion in this study.

Five participants were engaged in this study. Each participant met with me on Zoom to be interviewed for 90 minutes for phase one of data collection and again for phase two, which consisted of another 30-45 minutes to do member checking of their data. These individual interviews consisted of a series of questions that assisted me in gaining a better understanding of how these participants experienced life on their campus while participating in this program. Once the interviews were completed, I submitted the individual transcripts to the participants for their review so they could provide feedback on the accuracy of our conversation. Lastly, I conducted another 30 to 45-minute interview/follow-up conversation with these participants to review the themes that came out of their interviews and solicited any feedback on their perceived accuracies or inaccuracies of the themes.

This process of collecting and reviewing the data, to me, served two primary purposes: first, this ensured that the participants were as active in the research as possible, and second, to ensure that the data was triangulated and validated in a way that ensured what I was presenting was accurate based on what these participants felt they wanted to relay in their respective interviews. Because this is a narrative, qualitative study that used IC as the framework to analyze the experiences of these participants, I wanted to ensure that their voices were highlighted and that my representation of their experiences was as accurate as possible.

I also shared this belief and expectation with the study participants before we spoke, during their interviews, and when we met again to discuss emerging themes. The research questions listed below guided this study.

Research Questions:

1. How do Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a
    Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest determine their overall success
    while attending their institution?

2. What factors contribute to the successes and challenges of Black male college students in
    a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the
    Midwest?

3. How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program
    at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest navigate social and academic
    interactions, whether they are positive or negative, on their campus?

4. How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program
    at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest perceive the support provided
    to them by their campus community?

These questions assisted me with shaping the questions that were used throughout the interviews
with the selected participants.

Acknowledging the differences between myself as the researcher and the participants, I
maintained ethical integrity by protecting their identities and dignity. I transparently shared my
performativity to clarify my role and perspectives relative to the study. I have expounded on both
further below and in the methodology section of this proposal.

Ethical Concerns and Reciprocity

To ensure the subjects were respected and treated equitably, they were given the contact
information of my dissertation chair and my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as

points of contact if any concerns about me or the study arose during the process. I used

pseudonyms to mask the participants' identities in the study, and the institution was not identified

by name or by any information present in the study. Before interviewing the participants, I

shared that the process was strictly voluntary, and they could end the interview or participation,

in general, at any time during the process.

Reflexivity and Positionality

While I did not participate in a Black Male mentoring program as an undergraduate

student, I have participated in multiple mentoring programs throughout my life, both as a mentee

and mentor. As a Black male researcher, I share cultural similarities with participants rooted in

our collective racial identity and lived experiences navigating predominantly white institutions

(PWIs). To address these biases, I constantly self-reflected throughout this process to ensure that

my biases did not bleed into the interviewing process or the data analysis portion of this research.

I also informed the participants of my biases and triangulated the data to help mitigate any biases

that may have existed throughout this process.

As I conclude the discussion of my theoretical framework and structure, it is important to

share that every research approach, including narrative inquiry, is flawed. Although the narrative

inquiry approach is well-used, there are some concerns about institutional barriers and the impact

these can have on getting research approved (Bruce et al., 2016, p. 1.). In addition, unlike

quantitative research, where there is neutrality, and some things are known to be fact and set in

quantifiable numbers, a narrative approach does not depend on numbers to validate the work

done. In narrative research, the researcher must consider the specific experiences of the

participants as each of their experiences is unique (Creswell et al., 2007).

Definition of Key Terms

Black: A person who originates in any of the black racial groups of Africa (Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, 1997).

Black Male Initiative/Mentoring Program: is defined as a mentoring program that supports the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Black Male Collegiates (Harper, 2017). At Springpatch University, this program's mission and vision are as follows:

> *Mission:* "The Black Male Mentoring program is designed to provide experiences that contribute to the growth, development, retention, and graduation of male students from all backgrounds. This experience empowers students to take charge of their learning experiences and build meaningful communities."
>
> Vision, "The Black Male mentoring program will combine the skills of academic excellence, leadership, and career readiness to advance further the standing of Black men on Springpatch University's campus and in society." The Black Male Mentoring program will come together weekly to define success, set goals to achieve success, and hold each other accountable. These men will encourage each other, learn from each other, and transform into better men. Also, this group discusses current events and concepts that impact Black men.

Critical Race Theory: The progressive legal movement seeks to transform the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Interest Convergence: The unspoken benefit that White people or those in power get from disrupting racist/unjust systems (Bell, 1980)

Narrative Study: Narrative research studies the lived experiences of individuals over time. Narrative research is a type of research that consists of obtaining and then reflecting on people's lived experiences (Creswell et al., 2007)

Predominantly White Institutions: Colleges and Universities where White students comprise the student population more than any other student racial group (Bourke, 2016).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review for this research is structured as a Thematic Literature Review because this approach allowed a better capture of the areas of the Black male experiences on campuses that highlight their journey from being accepted to graduating. This study used Interest Convergence (IC) as the framework to examine the experiences of Black male students who participated in a Black male Mentoring program at a Springpatch University, a predominantly White institution in the Midwest. Not only are these experiences essential to note in the literature review, but they also address the full experiences of these participants.

Structuring the literature review in this way assisted in understanding the research that currently exists around examining why "Black male Initiatives (BMIs) programs have become popular initiatives over the past twenty years to provide support, resources, and familiarity to Black male students," (McCray, 2022, p. 80). McCray (2022) also argued that this increase in support programs for Black male students could be because the members in Black male initiative/mentoring programs often identify as "first-generation" students, meaning they are the first members of their immediate families to pursue higher education. McCray (2022) also alluded to the notion that university leaders should understand that these students need a different level of support and should put mechanisms in place to ensure their success. Other scholars argue that the increase in these programs serves the institutions more than the students (Bell, 1980). This perception of a self-serving approach to supporting Black male students is why Interest Convergence is being used as the framework for this study.

When discussing this population, the importance and impact of "Black male identity development, and three pillars of graduation: retention, persistence, and completion" (McCray, 2022, p. 79) must also be included in this conversation. This study focused on the narratives of these students and how their experiences while attending their PWI, Springpatch University. A Thematic Literature Review is one where the researchers focus on the themes outlined in the literature we are reviewing and not necessarily the timeline of the articles being reviewed. The following themes will be explored through literature for this study:

1. Theoretical Framework/Interest Convergence Theory

2. Access to higher education for this population,

3. Recruiting for this population,

4. Retaining this population,

5. Mentoring for this population,

6. Barriers for this population,

7. Holistic support for this population.

Theoretical Framework/Interest Convergence Theory

Whether this is because it is the right thing to do or because of the self-interests of preserving institutions, "diversity initiatives are [often] university-led efforts that promote a more equitable campus racial climate" (Lewis & Shah, 2021, p. 3.). While this researcher did not highlight diversity initiatives and their relation to Interest Convergence and the experiences of Black male students in chapter one, they explained what Interest Convergence (Bell, 1980) is and why it is best suited as the framework for this study was provided.
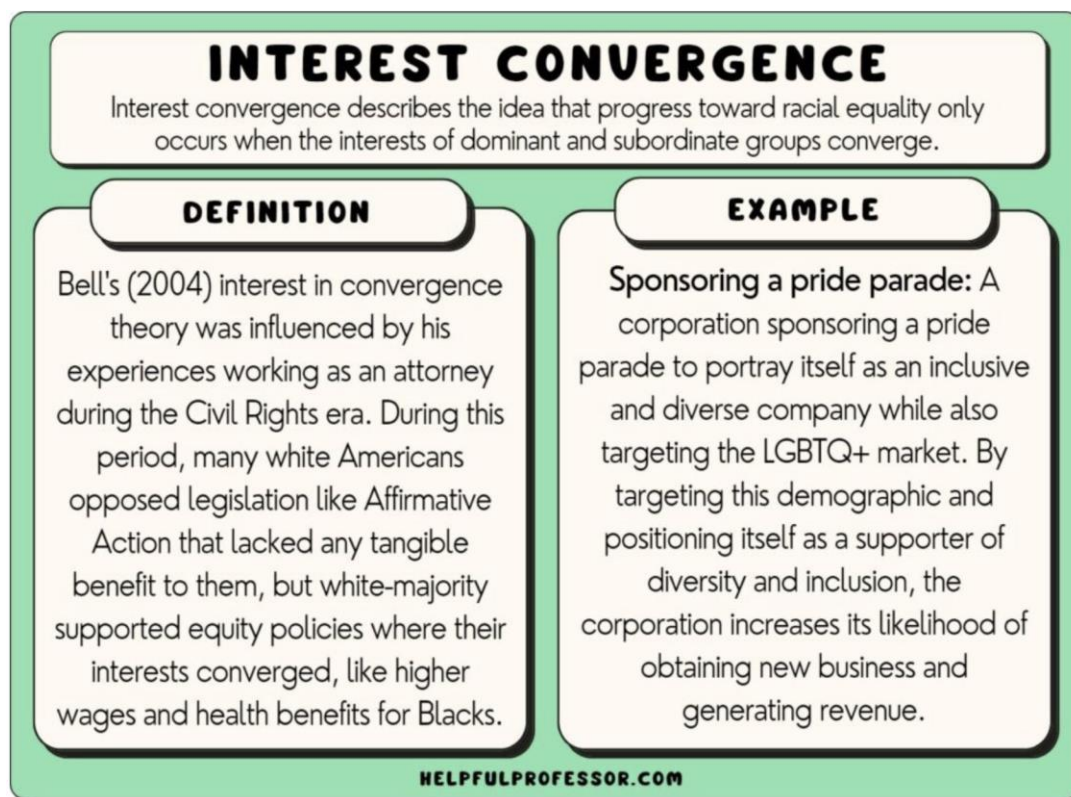
This section of the study expounds more on what Interest Convergence looks like as it relates to this population. Additionally, the literature reviewed showed how Interest Convergence (IC) works in general, and highlighted more critical literature that explained how it works in higher education. Scholars have argued that "because education is foundational to culture, educators must recognize how things that happen in schools affect the outcomes and practices of other public institutions and the larger society" (Rector-Aranda, 2016, p. 3) – understanding the impact that education and access have on how the more extensive society functions is not comfortable to discuss, as it would force our society to think about the self-serving reasons that guide how decisions are made around who gets supported and who gets barred from access to resources.

Some scholars believe that "Interest Convergence could be used as a tool to help explain and operationalize race and racism [how we view issues around race] in the field" (Milner, 2008, p. 332). In today's environment, with the rise of movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM), IC, a framework that argues that a significant motivating factor for many White peoples' actions and corporations' pronouncements against racism was not to advance Black equality [because of the protests around BLM], but the realization that the nation could not maintain its economic, political, and racial superiority over the rest of the world while remaining silent about anti-Black racism in America. The efforts around equity and inclusion are not altruistic but tied to the desire to preserve power and access to power. (Hoag-Fordjour, 2020, p. 3).

Self-service is at the center of IC, meaning how the world perceives the United States can impact how the world engages with the U.S. Not taking care of issues that some may consider an infringement on a group of people's human rights is bad for business. So, being judged in the

Court of public opinion was the reason we saw any changes being made in this country around BLM (Hoag-Fordjour, 2020), for additional clarity on how Interest Convergence can manifest in society, specifically as it pertains to a separate population that has been historically underserved or underrepresented.

Figure one shows Bell's (2004) Interest Convergence Theory, which holds the premise that progress toward racial equality is achieved only when the interests of dominant and subordinate groups align. The infographic, created by Sus (2003), provides a concise definition of the theory and an example to contextualize its application.

INTEREST CONVERGENCE
Interest convergence describes the idea that progress toward racial equality only occurs when the interests of dominant and subordinate groups converge.

DEFINITION
Bell's (2004) interest in convergence theory was influenced by his experiences working as an attorney during the Civil Rights era. During this period, many white Americans opposed legislation like Affirmative Action that lacked any tangible benefit to them, but white-majority supported equity policies where their interests converged, like higher wages and health benefits for Blacks.

EXAMPLE
Sponsoring a pride parade: A corporation sponsoring a pride parade to portray itself as an inclusive and diverse company while also targeting the LGBTQ+ market. By targeting this demographic and positioning itself as a supporter of diversity and inclusion, the corporation increases its likelihood of obtaining new business and generating revenue.

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Figure 1: **Bell's (2004) Interest Convergence Model (Sus, 2003)**

Access to Higher Education for this Population

Scholars have found that "admission counselors lack the proper resources, support, designated time, and effective communication and recognition from their university to recruit

African American males to the university effectively" (Brewer, 2018, p. 6). These issues will grow as more states look to clamp down on DEI admissions practices. There is a growing attack on programs that support the admission and retention of Black students from other races in the U.S. This increased after the 2023 ruling by the Supreme Court to remove affirmative action as a deciding factor in the college admissions process.

To make sense of what is happening in higher education around this decision, it is essential to realize that "education in the U.S.A. is not outlined explicitly in the nation's constitution; it is one of the social functions delegated to individual states. Consequently, states generate legislation and enact laws designed to proscribe the contours of education." (Ladson, Billings, 1998, p. 17). Even though this has always been the case, affirmative action's impact on how states dealt with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) issues were applied to all states because it was federal law. This has changed, and more states are moving towards stripping DEI efforts across all areas of education. This removal of DEI efforts has already impacted students' experience in higher education's admissions and recruitment process.

As a first-generation college student, who attended a PWI, many of the Black students, mainly male students who attended my university, were also first-generation college students. For several decades, policymakers and their constituents have been deeply concerned about the rising cost of American higher education (Davis, 2013). This is especially true for historically underserved students; however, Black Males are impacted at a higher rate.

Research indicates that institutional decision-makers' compliance with anti-Black ideologies perpetuates systemic disparities in enrollment practices and degree attainment rates within higher education (Allen et al., 2018). While sometimes not intentional, decision-makers

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can often display anti-Black sentiments, which negatively impacts their engagement with students who are recruited to that institution and how institutions approach the recruitment process with this population of students.

When discussing access to higher education for this population, it is essential to note that everything else matters if they can get into these institutions. Additionally, "overlooking critical areas of diversity-related campus initiatives may, in the end, preserve the very system that diversity advocates seek to transform" (Chang, 2002, p. 126). This means that admissions are where this all starts and not understanding how admissions practices impact this population is a misstep on the part of institutions. While other factors impact their success, this is where it starts.

In an additional article, it was shared that diversity needs to be a permanent part of who campuses are, as this impacts not just their students who have been historically underrepresented but all students as well (Chang, 2001). "Diversity alone has no significant educational benefits and is therefore not a legitimate goal" (Chang, 2002, p. 175). This highlights why diversity should not be a side conversation but a holistic conversation for the entire campus community.

Another component is understanding that test scores are just a minor component of these students' identity and how they can perform on our campuses. In the article Rethinking Standardized Testing, the authors discuss test scores and how this process does not help remove the equity barriers in the college recruitment process (Couch II et al., 2021). The article shared that "due to standardized testing, statistics continue to show only small gains in African American student test scores compared to other races" (Couch II et al., 2021, p. 1). Again, barriers already make discussing how students access these opportunities extremely difficult.

Recruiting for this Population

Sometimes, when discussing retaining students, there is a failure to do a deep dive into some of the barriers that may lead to them having access to higher education, and even the obstacles around how this population is recruited and retained. In this article, the authors discuss the impact that belonging, a lack of support, and the overall struggle to navigate a PWI can have on recruiting the Black males who attend these institutions.

Scholars discuss recruiting students differently in their article, saying that "selection in college admissions is, by definition, a practice in discrimination among students" (Bial & Rodriguez, 2007, p. 18). Again, the ability to attend certain institutions is often predicated on obtaining a scholarship, and plenty of assumptions come along with having that designation. However, there remains an option to attend school based on academic abilities if students have the resources to pay; not being able to pay does not mean they were not smart enough or could not be successful. Diversifying college campuses is a good thing, and this starts with diversifying the tools used to assess admission to these colleges and universities, as the current practices have biases attached to them.

There are also the resources and skills an institution may need to recruit these students, which they and their staff may need more. For example, in the article on Counselors' Ability to increase African African-American males at a private college, "admissions counselors lacked the necessary confidence to recruit African American males to the university effectively" (Brewer, 2018, p. 20). This means that there is a significant gap in the Black males who are being recruited and have access to higher education. It also addressed the issue of recruiting more African American students holistically. Additionally, it is clear that "declines in educational

performance, lower than expected four-year college-going rates, and uneven undergraduate, post-graduate and first-professional degree attainment by gender for African Americans" (Garibaldi, 1997, p. 106) are consistent issues that are still present regardless of the argument that African.

American Students have the same opportunities as others. Others share this sentiment: " Despite many noteworthy efforts to increase college access, minoritized students in general and Blacks, in particular, remain at the bottom of most statistical metrics of success in higher education" (Harper et al., 2018, p. 4). Again, this highlights the importance of getting to the root cause of this inequity issue.

Retaining this Population

Whether there is public acceptance or not, if students feel they need to feel more welcome on a college campus or feel they belong to a community, they will never stay there. This concern about not feeling welcomed or belonging came up through preliminary conversations with individuals with backgrounds like the one explored in this DIP. This observation is supported throughout the literature on this population, and one article even highlighted the fact that "despite colleges' efforts to be inclusive, discriminatory acts still occur on college campuses. Research has shown that campus racial climate contributes to the retention of students of Color within the college" (McClain & Perry, 2017, p. 2).

Again, if there is no intentional effort to ensure that campuses are safe and welcoming to these students, you will not retain them. Other scholars have shared in their research that "African American students that enroll at predominantly white institutions have expressed their

feelings of ostracism and lack of sense of belonging" (Eakins & Eakins, 2017, p. 56). Moreover, these are some things that impact retention and recruiting these students.

Mentoring For this Population

Overall, when Black Men who have had the experience of being members of a Black Male Mentoring program on their campus discuss their experience, they often discuss an individual or group of individuals who have served as mentors to them. While this is great, the structure has some issues around consistency and retaining the staff who mentor the men in these programs. "Although the institution provides a space for Black males, this is only contingent on the premise that Black male higher education professionals who are full-time workers will commit to the volunteer role to oversee the program" (McCray, 2002, p. 84).

Scholars have argued that while policies and programs are in place to enhance the presence of this population on our campuses, their growth as a population has been insignificant. Additionally, since the Supreme Court ruling about affirmative action in 2023, more states are looking at passing laws that remove resources that have supported this population. For example, Michigan laws are being passed that impact how campuses in that state deal with issues of diversity and inclusion, especially as there is a decline in the diversity representation of the student body. Understanding also that while "we focus on the racial and ethnic dimensions of diversity" (Garces et al., 2015, p. 830). There are also other areas of diversity to consider when looking at the impact diversity has on college campuses.

While disparity exists between White students and Black students at all levels of education, the conversation around how best to resolve this issue can sometimes be one-sided. This is mainly because the "dominant narrative about the educational outcomes of African

American students all but ignores the fact that the current education system – established only decades after slavery and still 50 years removed from Brown – was designed in an era when the educability and actual humanity of African Americans was an issue" (Fasching-Varner & Mitchell, 2013, p. 335). Understanding this disparity and creating opportunities for this population of students to be mentored is imperative to retaining this population of students on college campuses.

Barriers to Higher Education for Marginalized Students

Before addressing the barriers to higher education for this population, there needs to be an inclusion of an overview of access to Higher Education for marginalized students because this has always been an issue in the U.S., mainly because historically, marginalized people, especially Black people, were not permitted by law to attend formal education. They acknowledge that "for several decades, policymakers and the constituents they serve have been deeply concerned about the rising cost of American higher education" (Davis, 2013, p. 226). Cost is a transparent barrier and one that impacts Black students at a higher rate than White students. Even though the law around access has changed, and even with the creation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), access was still an issue because HBCUs were and still are severely underfunded compared to PWIs, and this level of underfunding impacts access and resources.

The conversations around bias and access all build on the discussion around access and support in higher education for marginalized students. This is a vital conversation at the admissions level and other college campus areas. Students need to understand how their campuses will support them, as individuals are involved in decision-making (Chang, 2001). We

must realize that "diversity alone has no significant education benefits and is therefore not a legitimate goal" (Chang, 2001, p. 175). This indicates that these individuals do not care about marginalized students and the richness of experiences they will bring to the campuses they attend. So, while a lot has changed based on laws and amendments, a lot has remained the same (Harper et al., 2016). Arguments around access to higher education for marginalized students have been shared that "evidence exists to confirm this has been the case with policies created to increase access and ensure equity for African American students in higher education" (Harper et al., 2016, p. 389). Again, while these policies are in place, these issues remain barriers to marginalized students.

The barriers to higher education for marginalized students are still evident even though policies and programs have been created to eliminate them. In addition, bias exists and impacts marginalized students' experiences at all levels of education (Allen et al., 2018). Some may conclude that "anti-black sentiments are major drivers of inequality in enrollment management and degree completion in higher education" (Allen et al., 2018, p. 41). Again, while this is not the only barrier, it is the most important, as there is a direct desire by the so-called "gatekeepers" to keep out marginalized students, especially Black students, just because they are Black.

There is also this misconception that because a student is Black, Brown, Disabled, poor, Gay/Lesbian, or any combination of the above, they are less than and unable to perform at the same level as their White counterparts. These students are consistently isolated and not included, leading to their creating groups and programs to support each other on their campuses. "On many predominantly white campuses, black students increasingly are instituting a self-imposed segregation" (Feaginn et al., 1995, p. 91). This means that these students are looking for

opportunities and creating experiences that allow them to connect and be supported in a way their campuses may not support them.

When administrators and others allow students the opportunity to use their voices to advocate for themselves in these cases, it is imperative, as even on college campuses, it is not uncommon for administrators and others to act in a way that makes it seem as if they know what is best for students, without genuinely listening to them. Many negative findings are alarming and often neglect students' insight and potential solutions for these obstacles (Scott et al., 2013). Again, administrators and others must embrace the importance of the marginalized students' voice, as doing so is essentially removing a barrier that exists. Another barrier that goes unnoticed is the lack of representation and support from this representation for this population.

It is not uncommon to have little or no faculty or administrative staff who are Black or members of other marginalized groups on their campuses. Educators and scholars from school districts throughout the nation have made countless attempts to maintain a diversified teacher workforce that reflects the diversity of our student populations (Newton, 2013). Again, this speaks to the importance of representation, not just at the K-12 level but also in higher education. A lack of representation indicates that the campus needs to do more to actively recruit, nurture, support, and retain faculty and staff who fall into marginalized categories. This is an ongoing issue for students and their parents who see this and ask, "How will my child/I be supported?" This question is fundamental because supporting these students is crucial to their success.

Holistic Support for Marginalized Students

Institutions must do all the things outlined above to support marginalized students. They also must figure out how to support marginalized students because supporting them on a college

campus is essential to retaining them. This is important because, according to some scholars, "four critical areas of campus diversity are typically absent from mainstream public discourse aimed at preserving race-conscious admissions practices. Shaped largely by legal deliberations, this discourse tends to (a) overlook the full historical development of diversity-related efforts, (b) focus primarily on admissions as the main goal, (c) ignore transformative aims, and (d) underestimate the impact of diversity on student learning" (Chang, 2002, p. 3). The absence of these missing areas of campus diversity negatively impacts the holistic and overall experiences of underserved students, especially Black Male students. So, even though the impact of "equalizing educational attainment has been regarded nationally as a necessary if not sufficient, condition for creating a more just society" (St. John et al., 2004, p. 209), it is not enough.

If institutions genuinely want to strive for a just environment and provide access for all, they must understand the barriers that prevent a just environment. They must then work towards being a part of the solution to disrupting these barriers. If they cannot disrupt the system, opportunities need to be in place to support the well-being and success of the marginalized students who come to their campuses. The support offered to these students not only impacts the campus positively but also ensures that these students are successful and able to graduate. It is also important to highlight that, especially in a post-COVID world where mental health issues are on the rise, there is an understanding that supporting marginalized students' needs to happen socially and psychologically as well.

These schools are responsible for providing support at all levels, and how they engage with students will say a lot about how these students experience their campuses. Not providing this support is no longer an option, especially seeing as the marginalized student populations on

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these campuses are constantly performing at a deficit. Despite many noteworthy efforts to increase college access, minority students in general and Blacks remain at the bottom of most statistical metrics of success in higher education, Harper et al. (2018). If these institutions are admitting these students, then they need to be responsible for genuinely supporting them because not doing so will negatively impact these students and lead them to have lifelong barriers like psychological trauma, debt, and other issues that stem from them not being supported. This acknowledges the importance of getting to the root cause of this inequity issue. It is important to note that focusing on what is next and how best to facilitate impactful change is mandatory. Doing so will allow future generations of marginalized students to complete college while having a successful experience.

Based on the scholarly articles, these students are essential to their success. Further, they found that there are consistent conversations around persistence and retention. While these are sometimes used interchangeably, there needs to be more conversation about how best to remove existing barriers. The observation around the use of persistence and retention is supported by scholars who argue that "both persistence and retention have been used interchangeably throughout the literature in higher education" (McElderry, 2022, p. 37); this acknowledgment to me is an indication that persistence and retention are how administrators view the experiences of these students. However, there is no focus on the barriers that exist and on removing these barriers, and this is a gap in the research. "While there are numerous reasons that contribute to Black college males departing from college before earning a college degree, there are visible and present reasons that are beyond the control of Black males" (Ottley & Ellis, 2019, p. 73).

Having a conversation that focuses on persistence and retention while not discussing barriers means that the student's success is being placed on the student alone, and there are no conversations about the institution's responsibility to remove the obstacles and give students the tools needed to succeed. Creating a community is a significant part of providing holistic support for these students. Additionally, on many predominantly White campuses, Black students increasingly are instituting self-imposed segregation (Feaginn & Sikes, 1995); this is because they do not feel included. Most people desire to connect with others around them, whether they are different or not.

Additionally, research shows that "attending college with those of other races and ethnicities increases the likelihood that students will socialize across racial lines and talk about critical matters" (Chang, 2001, p. 10). This is a significant benefit to not only creating a safe environment for marginalized students but also allowing marginalized students to feel connected to their campuses and an opportunity to contribute to creating the spaces they desire on their campuses.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Statement of Purpose and Introduction

Historically, many Black Males and people of Color had to deal with concerns on their campuses around issues with admissions, housing, microaggressions, social awareness, and other double standards as they pertain to their college experiences. Performing this qualitative narrative study that is framed in Interest Convergence (IC), a tenant of Critical Race Theory (CRT), provided a better understanding of how participating in a Black Male Initiative/Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest, has impacted the experiences of Black Males who participated in this program, at this institution.

Higher education is pivotal for progression in this country, as King Jr. et al. state, "Higher education is a key pathway for social mobility in the United States" (King Jr. et al., 2016, p. 1). Understanding some things that impacted the access and completion of Black Male students added to the existing research on this population. Understanding this is important because Black Male students are graduating at lower rates than their White Male counterparts. Even Female students in general institutions have looked to Black Male Mentoring (BMI) programs and others that are structured like them to support this student population (King Jr. et al., 2016, p. 20). This research will focus on understanding what impact, if any, these programs have on the experiences of Black males who participate in a Male Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest.

This narrative study used a purposeful/purposive approach to data collection and Analysis. It focused on all aspects of the educational experiences for these students, whether it pertains to academics, social awareness, locating services, or support from the staff and faculty

that hold positions at the institution. Documenting the personal experiences of these students allowed me to analyze the data in a way that helped me understand how these experiences have shaped who these young men are, identify any gaps that may exist in that specific program, and, most importantly, understand and identify the areas that the program excelled in. The theoretical framework for this study utilized Critical Race Theory, focusing specifically on the interest convergence component of this theory to examine the experiences of these participants.

Research Design

A qualitative study was utilized for this research. Specifically, a narrative approach was used to gather and analyze the collected data. I focused on the experiences of Black males participating in a Black male initiative/mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), Midwestern University. I identified the problem that exists as Black Male students are graduating at lower rates than their White Male counterparts, and even Women students in general. Based on this, institutions have looked to Black Male Mentoring (BMI) programs and others that are structured like them to support this student population.

I sought to understand how the participants experienced their campus as participants of a Black Male Initiative/Mentoring program through the lens of Interest Convergence. Using this narrative approach allowed me to identify the problem, make predictions about the study, gather data that aligns with my predictions, and analyze that data to see if the research questions posed could be answered (Creswell & Guetterman, 2017, p. 7). I had individual conversations with these participants; hence, a narrative inquiry was the approach to use in this situation, as the participants will be individuals who are willing to share their stories and how those experiences have been impacted by their environments (Creswell & Guetterman, 2017, p. 513). It is also

important to understand that multiple types of narrative studies range from interviews to ethnographies and everything in between (Creswell & Guetterman, 2017, p. 515); for my study, I used interviews to gather this data from my participants.

Every research approach has flaws, and narrative inquiry is the same. Even though this approach is well-used, there are some concerns about institutional barriers and the impact these can have on getting research approved (Bruce et al., 2016, p. 1). In addition to all I have shared above about narrative research, I also wanted to share that, unlike quantitative research, where there is neutrality and some things are known to be fact and set in quantifiable numbers, a narrative approach does not depend on numbers to validate the work that is done. In narrative research, I considered the specific experiences of the participants I engaged, as each of those experiences was unique to the participant in question (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 182).

Instrumentation

I conducted a constructive narrative study to understand the experiences of Black Males who participated in a Black Male Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution. I interviewed the participants for this study, and I, as the researcher, served as the instrument as I collected and analyzed the data. I also utilized a simple list of demographic questions to gather basic demographic information about the participants.

The demographic information collected in this qualitative study allowed me to have a preliminary understanding of who the participants were and gather information, like "year in school," "first-generation college student," "state or country of origin," and other information that shaped or impacted how they answered the questions that were asked of them throughout the study.

Research Procedures

Participants

To participate in this study, an individual must self-identify as a Black Male and have participated in or currently participated in a Black Male Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest. I used a purposive sampling method to select these participants; I was already familiar with them and sought their permission to participate in the study since I am familiar with their association with the Black Male Mentoring program on their campus.

These participants were selected because they met the criteria of the participants I sought to engage with for this study. I looked at the experiences of five students who self-identify as Black Male students who participated in a Black Male Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest. I recruited an academically diverse group of participants for this study. The breakdown of the participants is as follows: one graduate of the institution and program, one graduate student, one sophomore, one junior, and one senior. Only students who met the specific criteria for this study were included in the participant group.

Data Collection

For this narrative study, I gathered primary demographic data from the participants at the beginning of each interview. This allowed me to confirm a few things: how these students self-identify, whether they attend the institution or not, and whether they are currently or were ever participants in the institution's Male Initiative/Mentoring Program. I also conducted individual 90-minute interviews with each of the participants. I also asked questions that allowed me to understand who these students were concerning socioeconomic class, year in school, major,

course load, and residency status (if they live on campus or not, and if they are in-state or out-of-state students). The interviews were conducted via Zoom, and the questions for the individual interviews were generated using my research questions as a guide.

I used a purposive sampling approach to collect this data as I was familiar with some individuals in this population. I connected with the participants and gave them the informed consent forms and all other documentation that the IRB required to obtain their consent to participate in the study. I got those back from the participants and could proceed with the interviews.

Data Analysis

I used the following research questions to help guide the creation of my interview questions. The research questions were also used to create the broad themes that will house the ideologies that will come out of the data collected during the interviews:

1. How do Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest determine their overall success while attending their institution?

2. What factors contribute to the successes and challenges of Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest?

3. How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest navigate social and academic interactions, whether they are positive or negative, on their campus?

4. How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest perceive the support provided to them by their campus community?

The interviews lasted 90 minutes in length and consisted of a series of questions that assisted me in gaining a better understanding of how these participants experienced life on their campus while participating in this program. Once the interviews were completed, I submitted the individual transcripts to the participants for their review so they could provide feedback on the accuracy of our conversations.

Lastly, I conducted another 30 to 45-minute interview/follow-up to review the themes I came up with, each of the participants again, and solicit any feedback on their accuracies or inaccuracies. This-serves two primary purposes: (1) to ensure that the participants were fully engaged in the research, and (2) to confirm that the data was triangulated and validated to ensure that my presentation is accurate.

Validity

While I did not participate in a Black Male Mentoring program during my undergraduate experience, I have participated in multiple mentoring programs, both as a mentee and mentor, and I also identify as a Black Male, so I shared some capital with the individuals who were identified as participants in this study. I informed the participants of this to ensure they were aware of any biases I might have because of similar experiences.

I constantly self-reflected throughout this process and certify that the participants' voices were their own and not a reflection of my biases. In addition to doing this, I ensured that the data being collected was triangulated by submitting the individual transcripts to the participants for

their review and for their feedback on our conversation's accuracy. I conducted another 30-45-minute interview/follow-up to review the themes I came up with from the participants and solicit any feedback on their accuracies or inaccuracies. This served two primary purposes: 1. ensured that the participants were as active in the research as much as possible, and 2. ensured that the data was triangulated and validated in a way that ensures what I am presenting is accurate. As a reminder, my research questions are:

1. How do Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest determine their overall success while attending their institution?

2. What factors contribute to the successes and challenges of Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest?

3. How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest navigate social and academic interactions, whether they are positive or negative, on their campus?

4. How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest perceive the support provided to them by their campus community?

The research questions listed above helped set the foundation for creating the questions I asked the participants to respond to. These questions were designed to garner a better understanding of how my study participants experienced their campus as participants of a Black Male Mentoring program. Using a constructive narrative approach allowed identifying the

problem, making predictions about the study, gathering data that aligns with my predictions, and analyzing that data to see if the research questions posed can be answered (Creswell & Guetterman, 2017, p. 7).

Ethical Concerns and Reciprocity

I used pseudonyms to mask the participants' identities; the institution was not identified through this research. Before interviewing the participants, I shared with them that the process is strictly voluntary, and they could end the interview or change their minds and choose not to participate at any time. They were also given my chair's contact information so they could reach out if they had any concerns. In addition to this, participants were respected and treated equitably throughout the process. The skills I learned throughout my doctoral courses and CITI training allowed me to navigate these interviews successfully and the research conducted for this dissertation.

Reflexivity and Positionality

While I did not have a Black Male Mentoring program as an undergrad, I have participated in multiple mentoring programs as a mentee and mentor throughout my life. I identify as a Black male and have shared cultural experiences with the individuals participating in this study. To address these biases, I constantly self-reflected throughout this process to ensure that my biases did not bleed into the interviewing process or the data analysis portion of this research. I also informed the participants of my biases so that they were aware. The data collected was also triangulated to help mitigate and eliminate any biases that may have existed.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

This narrative study sought to understand the experiences of Black Males who participate in a Black Male Initiative/Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest. The framework for this study is Interest Convergence, a theory that is a tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Based on this framework, one of the assumptions I made is that some of the experiences these students have with their campus community are based on the belief that their campus communities will benefit equally, if not more, from those experiences.

Additionally, this is a sample of students that only considered the experiences of those students who are at a specific institution and are members of a particular demographic. I am unsure how this impacted other marginalized populations, or what the data reflected with a larger sample population. Based on this, while this study serves as a tool, it may not be easy to use the information to give a general overview of similar participants in similar programs at different institutions. Below is a table of the participants who engaged in this study and some background information on the participants via their respective profiles.

Table 1: Overview of Participants

General Information	TJ	Johnny	King	Matt	Bob
Classification	Senior	Junior	Sophmore	Grad Student	Graduated
First Generation College Student (FGCS)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Prior Exposure to Mentoring	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Interested in Mentoring Others	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Engaged in other activities on campus	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Participant Profiles

Below is a narrative overview of each participant who engaged in this study. Each of the five participants met the criteria of 1. Identifying as a Black Male student, they were participating or had participated in the Male Mentoring program at this predominantly White institution in the Midwest. Four of the five participants interviewed were classified as sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate students, and one participant had graduated from the institution and the Black Male mentoring program.

TJ

TJ is currently a senior at this institution. He is a first-generation college student who is majoring in professional studies. He is the youngest of five siblings and grew up in a large city approximately two hours away from his campus. During our time together, he shared that his desire to obtain a college education stemmed from his desire for a better life. TJ shared that his only concept of college came from seeing a relative navigate college and wondering if it was possible for him. TJ is involved in the Black Male Mentoring program, other programs, and social clubs on campus. He believes these engagement opportunities have kept him connected with the campus community.

Johnny

Johnny is a junior majoring in business administration at this university. Johnny is acutely aware of the unique challenges of being a first-generation college student, and he thinks it is up to him to show his other family members that all things are possible. He shares that going to college is not only for him and his immediate family but also for his extended family members, who all look up to him. He is involved in the Black Male Mentoring program on campus and Greek life through his work in his fraternity.

King

King stepped on his campus with a desire to succeed, regardless of what the odds were going to be. From an early age, his family instilled in him the importance of obtaining a college degree and ensured that he realized that a college degree would open doors once closed to individuals who looked like him. Both of King's parents are college graduates, and his grandparents on both sides are also college graduates. He believes that his life as it pertains to a

college education was already predetermined before he was even born and that the people in his family depend on him to carry this legacy of academic excellence forward.

He has an older sister who is also in college but at a different university, and he believes she feels the same way about their parents' expectations of them. King is majoring in sociology and hopes to change the world once he finishes his academic pursuits. He is involved in the Black Male Mentoring program on campus and will be getting more involved in other programs on campus in the upcoming academic year.

Matt

Matt spent four years in this Black Male Mentoring program on his campus; he was a fifth-year senior because of what he calls "a lack of academic advising support." He is a first-generation college student with no idea what he was doing when he first entered university. In reflecting on the journey that had brought him to this moment, he shared feelings of gratitude, disappointment, and regret. As the first person in his family to graduate college and now pursuing a master's degree, he shares that he often feels "the weight of expectation and responsibility on his shoulders." He shares that this is magnified because his parents are immigrants to this country, and their expectations are magnified by their desire to ensure he can live "the American Dream" and make them and his extended family proud.

Bob

Bob was raised in a small town over an hour from his university. He and his siblings were exposed to college through mentoring programs and knew early on that their parents expected them to attend college; they did not know how it would work. He is the oldest among his siblings, so he believes a significant amount of pressure is being placed on him to set the

standard for his younger siblings to follow. During our time together, Bob articulated that obtaining this degree was one of the hardest things she had ever done and that his path was often "fraught with challenges and moments of self-doubt." These feelings and emotions were magnified by the resources or a lack thereof, that he believed were present for him on his campus, and he is not only proud of himself for persevering but also for doing so with grace and doing it his way, even though the odds were stacked against him. With the overview of participants who participated in the study completed, the findings will be addressed next.

Overview of Themes

The findings were examined using the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two of this work. As a reminder, Interest Convergence was used as the theoretical framework that guided this study. Interest Convergence (Bell, 1980) was born out of Critical Race Theory, a perspective formed out of laws passed in the U.S. that focused on the impact of discrimination. Rooted in Bell's (1980) theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT) analyzes the racial power structure through five key tenets: (1) race as a social construct, (2) permanence of racism, (3) Interest Convergence, (4) critique of liberalism, and (5) intersectionality. CRT scholars also argued that the absence of a conversation around power in any situation where race and underserved groups are being discussed means that we are missing critical components of how privilege and power impact Blacks and other marginalized groups. Critical Race theorists emphasized that Black and indigenous subordination was systemically enforced through the legal enactments of race and property rights - from slave codes valuing human capital to homestead acts privileging white land ownership - widening the wealth gaps (Crenshaw et al., 1996). Interest Convergence aligns with all of the themes identified in this study, specifically as it

pertains to understanding and highlighting how the power dynamics impacted the lived experiences of the participants in this study, they perceive to exist between them and Springpatch University.

The findings chapter discussed the following themes through the lens of IC: Theme 1: Access to higher education for this population; Theme 2: Recruiting for this population; Theme 3: Retaining this population; Theme 4: Mentoring for this population; Theme 5: Barriers for this population; and Theme 6: Holistic support for this population. Each theme is discussed individually over the following pages through the lens of the participants interviewed for this study and how IC showed up in their experiences.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

This qualitative narrative study examined how mentoring has impacted the college experience of Black male students who attend a predominantly White university in the Midwest. This researcher could converse with five students who participated in The Black Male Mentoring program at Springpatch University. The conversations were structured as individual/one-on-one interviews where the participants engaged with the researcher privately about their lived experiences as participants of this study. Additionally, to triangulate the data collected, the researcher allowed the participants to engage in an individual member-checking conversation via Zoom regarding the collected data.

Theme 1: Interest Convergence in Theory: Access to Higher Education for this Population

The first theme explored in this study is access to higher education for this population, students of color, particularly Black males, have a more challenging time accessing higher education than students who make up other demographics. Scholars have identified anti-Black racism as a systemic barrier fueling inequities in college enrollment practices and graduation outcomes (Allen et al., 2018, p. 41). The participants of this study confirmed this during our time together. While some could not explicitly name the "why" behind their struggles with access to higher education, they constructed their narratives to allow this researcher to ask questions that garnered interesting responses to how they perceived their access to higher education stories. It became clear that gatekeeping by those in power and the lack of equity often present in how historically underserved or historically underrepresented students gain access to higher education institutions were present throughout this research. Throughout this study, the participants were

clear in narrating the fact that accessibility is still not as easy as most people are making it out to be, especially as it pertains to Black men, who are at the lower end of the totem pole when it comes to accessing higher education and the resources needed to navigate this journey successfully.

In unpacking access and how it impacted his ability to attend his PWI, TJ stated:

> While I was in a city, the majority of my teachers did not look like me. I did not feel as if my school counselor cared for me in the way she did other students, so I was not offered the resources I now knew I needed, especially as it pertained to thinking about college. It was when a relative of mine who had attended college started conversing with me over my spring break when they came to visit that I realized I needed to catch up and missed out on so much information about attending college.

Bob's experience further epitomized this structural marginalization:

> No one in my school even looked in my direction around college. In thinking about this more, I can see how they may have thought that I was not worthy or a problem child. It is weird now that I think about it; not only was I the first in my family to get this far in high school, but I would have been the first in my family to attend college. And I know they knew this because I would help my parents fill out the little survey, they sent us when we first started in that school district. It makes me angry when I think about it, and I am thankful for a mentor that I met through Big Brother and Big Sister, who I was paired with during my senior year. My Big started to talk to me about college, and that is how I really started to realize it could be a possibility, as up until that point, my parents were stressing about which college, how to even go to college, and how they would pay for it.

Matt's experience was like Bob and TJ's; when asked to describe his experiences or perception around access to higher education, he stated that:

> This was probably the most difficult thing I had ever done in my life, Mr. Doss. I was so lost, man, and to think that now I am in grad school is blowing my mind every day. I struggled every day here, and I am thankful for the people like Dr. Thomas, who introduced me to the mentoring program because my experience would have been way worse. I understood nothing. I could not make it to any of the open houses or any of that. My parents did not have the time to do much either; I started that fall before COVID took over the world, and I feel like had I started during COVID, I would have transitioned better because everything was online. My parents are immigrants, and no one explained anything to us. People ask me when I share my story about how I got here, "Where was your high school counselor?"

Matt's challenges reflected systemic barriers common to first-generation immigrant students limited institutional guidance, cultural knowledge gaps, and COVID-era disruptions. He expanded on this structural neglect:

> I laugh because people act like they do not know what is up and do not know that there are high school counselors out there hindering people from their dreams. After all, they do not think they deserve it, and sometimes they do not even know what the possibilities of those dreams are and could be. I never felt like I could be successful in college because no one had ever talked to me about it. I also did not know how I would pay for it. My parents made too much money for me to get certain benefits but needed to make more for

us to not struggle in a lot of ways. So, yeah, access and understanding the dos and don'ts

of what it takes to enter college and even be successful was hard for me.

King was the outlier to this concept of struggling with access; he was also one of the two

participants who had exposure to mentoring and shared a different take on access and what it

meant to him and his process. He shared that:

My parents were adamant about exposing me to mentoring and opportunities to engage

not just with people who looked like me but those who thought differently than I did. It

was important to them, and I did not realize this at the time, as they felt that I was

surrounded by people who did not look like me, and they wanted me to understand early

on that Black excellence is all around me, even if I was not seeing it in my day-to-day

life. Being able to engage with people in this way also meant that I was able to hear these

individuals' stories and learn from them about how they dealt with challenges.

King admitted that there was no true struggle to access for him regarding his institution by

sharing:

Access to my institution was not super horrible, but I think it was because, honestly, my

parents did it all for me. Do not get me wrong, I was there with them every step of the

way, but they wanted to make sure, especially the financial aid part, was done right.

I'mma be honest with you Mr. Doss, I would have been lost, so now that you ask me that

question, I am thinking about the people who may not have a mom and dad who have

knowledge of these things and how access looks for them.

Access is unfortunately tied to affordability, and during his interview, King affirmed this, as he

stated:

My parents were able to pay for portions of my bill because they had been saving since I

was born for this. I have friends who are not this lucky. So, I did not have issues with

access, really, because, you know, the parents did their big one and handled all those

things on my behalf, and I am thankful. Come to think of it. I take that back because I

remember my mom saying, 'This was some foolishness' a couple times while we were

working on my applications, but it could very well have been something else. I did what

she always told me and stayed in a child's place and did not ask any questions, (laughs).

Johnny, like Matt, felt that this experience of gaining college access was one of the difficulties.

He shared that:

Mr. Doss, honestly, I almost didn't come here, this was as last minute as making a

McDonald's run at 11 o'clock at night. It was not supposed to happen, but God had other

plans for my life. I feel like I have my city on my back, and I must do it for myself, my

cousins, and other family members who are younger than me and watching. And I'mma

tell you this: I promised myself that nobody I know will feel this way when thinking

about or wanting to even go to college.

The desire to attend college or university is sometimes not honed based on all the barriers to a

college education. Based on this interview, it was clear that Johnny felt the burdens of some of

these barriers. Johnny's experience instilled in him the desire to help those who come after him,

as he shared:

Imma be able to help my people, because I know some things now, I know enough to

make sure I can help them to not have some of the struggles I had with paperwork, and

knowing who to go to for things. It's not easy reaching out to strangers for help, even if

that's what they are there for, and sometimes, when you don't know the right questions to ask, you freeze up and just don't bother. It messes up your mind, too, you know what I mean, because you start asking yourself a whole bunch of questions that are dumb questions, not that I think about it. Like, why are you even trying to do this? You know you don't belong here.

The experiences these participants shared around access were glaring because, regardless of their designation, first-generation college student or not, or if they had mentoring experiences, they felt that there were some innate struggles with gaining access seamlessly to their university. This ties into how these participants were recruited to their institution and their experiences around being recruited to their institution, and is the theme that will be discussed next. There is a shared belief by the participants of this study that the access they've been afforded is conditional and tied to the fact that they are suitable for the "numbers" game that universities are about when it comes to funding and being perceived as having some level of diversity. This ties into the next theme, which is recruiting for this population.

Theme 2: Recruiting for this population

Recruitment for students of color, especially Black Male students, to college campuses, has been researched extensively. Some scholars believe that "despite many noteworthy efforts to increase college access, minoritized students in general and Blacks, in particular, remain at the bottom of most statistical metrics of success in higher education" (Harper et al., 2018, p. 4). This means that while there are efforts around recruitment for this population, there is still a gap between Black male students who are recruited to colleges and universities and other demographics.

Interest Convergence and the mindset that the reason these students are even sought after is to help with their overall diversity numbers is not a far-fetched idea. Ironically, the participants in this study, except for one, were not even looked at/recruited by their university; they became students because of happenstance. These students were academically equipped to navigate this campus successfully but, for some reason, did not check the boxes that were required to be recruited for their campus. Whether by design or done inadvertently, these students believe they are only useful to their campus when diversity is needed. It seems that it is self-serving to recruit members from this community without genuinely wanting them to be a part of it; this ethos aligns with the concept of interest convergence.

Johnny, when responding to the questions about how he came to attend this university and how he was recruited to this university, said:

> Mr. Doss, no one really recruited me to this university, I didn't even know about this university to tell you the truth. I knew that I wasn't going to stay where I grew up because there was no opportunity to do anything that was meaningful, and I wanted more for my life. I just didn't know what that was going to be. No one sought me out and said, "Hey, you wanna come to this school?" It was just luck. I was driving by to one of my cousin's basketball games in Evansville and saw a sign for this school and another school. I said, "I'm gonna just look at what the website is talking about," and that's what I did; when I called the other school, I didn't feel like they were giving me enough information over the phone, and this school was kinda the same but a little different. But then, I saw that the president was Black, and I asked my mom, "Can you try to help me figure this out?" And the rest is history.

The concept of worth and value in the recruitment process is one that came up in these conversations, and Johnny alluded to this when he shared:

> I don't think I fit the mold of who they were looking for, and that is probably why no one reached out to me, which is cool. I'm here now, and I'mma make the best of it, trust. And look, I'm not even going to say this has been easy, because it hasn't, I sometimes wonder if going through life here is easier for people who they recruited, you know what I mean? Because it's like, they wanted them here, so they gotta treat them differently and right, right? And I'm not even saying like people are out to get me or nothing like that, it's just that outside of the Center [explain] and the program, it's like people ain't really tryna fool with us, and that weird, but whatever.

TJ's story was somewhat the same, however a little different. During his interview, TJ shared that:

> Man, look, I had no clue where this place was or what went on here. If it weren't for my relative who started looking out for me, I'd still be on the block, maybe even would have gone and tried to get a trade, but I don't know. So, while the school itself didn't recruit me, my relative graduated from here. She knew the ropes and kinda told me how things were and what it would look like. So, she kinda recruited me by telling me how these things went and are.

Recruitment when it comes to higher education, especially as it pertains to historically underserved or underrepresented populations, is fluid, meaning recruitment does not have to go directly from the schools themselves but from individuals outside of that ecosystem who believe

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in connecting a student with the resources on that specific campus. TJ's story about his relative reiterated this, he stated that:

> She helped me apply, she helped me with understanding financial aid, she came up here with me and walked me round to all these offices, she helped me getting registered. Man, she did it all, I mean, I was just looking at her like she was crazy because it was a lot, I had no idea what was going on. She was my recruiter, and not gonna lie, when I came up here for orientation, it didn't feel like I was lost because she had already done all these things with me and took the time out of her schedule to make sure I was set and had what I needed to start on the right foot. That's a solid I will never forget, but naw, they didn't recruit me here, I just happen to end up here. She also connected me with the Center and also the Black Mentoring program. Like she literally walked me over there and was like, "this is my cousin, he's going to be in the program, if he cuts up call me and I'll be back up here." She was not playing around man, so I feel like I had aunties and uncles all over the campus who are looking out for me because of her, and that's what's up for real. Them the people that don't make it seem like I'm bothering them, and I seriously go to them for everything.

King was the anomaly out of the participants, as he was recruited to his university. He stated that:

> It seemed like they were sending me emails every week, whether it was about housing, meal plans, or things to get signed up for, and even scholarships. That was the biggest one, really. I was able to apply for the presidential scholarship and didn't actually get it, but I got some other scholarships. The scholarships really sweetened the deal for my

family, you know, and made the decision about attending here. So, yeah, the significant

scholarships played a major role in my recruitment here, and the decision was pretty set.

Location and proximity to family can sometimes be a deciding factor in the decisions the

students who participated in this study made. King was adamant that proximity to his mom and

family was central in deciding which university to attend. He shared that:

I had other schools that were recruiting me, and the money was just not adding up. There

was one that was close to giving me the money I received here, but it was too far. I love

my mom and need to be closer to her. I applied to that school because it wasn't too far,

but I really wasn't feeling it to begin with, if I'm being honest. My parents were pushing

me to apply to multiple schools and I did, but kinda already had my mind made up that I

wasn't going anywhere that it would take me more than 4hrs to get home to my parents.

But yeah, I got what looked like an email a week starting the fall of my senior year, with

all this information about applying for scholarships and housing and everything like that.

My parents were the ones monitoring that email account, and they handled all of the

information and stuff like that for me to apply to these schools, so again, if it weren't for

my parents, I would be lost, lost, not even gonna lie and pretend like they didn't do all

they did to get me to this point. This is also why I go so hard, man; I can't let them down.

Bob's experience with being recruited for this university differed from King's, but there are some

parallels involving scholarships. Bob shared:

To be honest, I was going to go wherever the money was. Honestly, no one in my family

had the money to pay for me to go to school, and I would hear all these horror stories

about people going into debt without scholarships and how bad it is to drop out because

you still end up owing that money. The pressure was high. If I'm being honest, I

sometimes don't even know how I ended up here, and that's the honest-to-God truth. God

has been good to me and my family, and that's the only reason why I've made it this far.

But as far as getting things in the mail from the school, naw, they didn't send anything my

way.

The notion that students can sometimes be in the same space and place but have different

experiences and access based on our cultural capital is evident in this study. Bob, while narrating

his experience of being recruited to his campus, shared that:

I actually ran into a couple people from my high school on campus and was shocked to

see them here. Not because I didn't think they should be here, but more like a, 'Wow, you

know about this place too. I thought you would be somewhere else', kinda way. I wasn't

super cool with those people in high school, you know, I didn't play sports or anything

like that, but I was involved in my school's mentoring program, and that's how I met my

"Big." If we're talking about recruiting, my big did that; he took my pops and me down

here for a tour before I even applied. He was explaining the whole thing and process to

my father and me on our way here and telling us the different ways we could pay for

school.

Understanding the impact mentoring plays in the lives of students who participate in mentoring

activities. Bob reinforced this by sharing that:

I actually got a scholarship through that mentoring program as well that was continuous,

and there was also a one-time only scholarship that I got as well. We started to look at the

whole school with my mom when I got back home, and I think the decision was made

that if I could get some more money from the grants the school was talking about giving

out, then I would go. The rest is history, but yeah, my "Big" was the one who recruited

me. No one from the school did.

Matt's experience was similar to Bob's experience. When asked to describe his experiences or

perception around being recruited to his university, he stated:

I am a grad student, so I have been here for five years, and I'mma tell you that there is

nothing similar about the way I was recruited to do my first degree and how I was

recruited to do a graduate degree here. Undergrad, I didn't hear a peep outta this place. I

wasn't even on their radar; I'm being so for real right now (laughs). I don't even think they

knew who Matt was, which is weird, seeing as I came here and made my presence

known, and I'm thankful for that in more ways than you can imagine. This program, man,

this program, if it wasn't for this program, I wouldn't even know what a grad school was,

and I'm being so for real. One of the first things we do in this program is work on a

resume and also set goals. Please believe me when I tell you that I went into that first

meeting with no goal outside of finishing school. Five years later, look at me—doing the

thing and reaching back. But yeah, these people weren't paying me no mind or attention

and that's ok, because I'm here and I did it.

Theme 3: Retaining this population

Scholars have long articulated their concerns about the support provided to historically

underrepresented populations on college campuses. This study examines how institutional

support systems are designed and implemented for Black male college students. These scholars

argue that the work being done to support this population of students is "continually mishandled

by educators, policymakers, and concerned others" (Harper, 2012, p. 4), and the impact of this is far-reaching.

When asked about the support he received around academic success and even being retained by his campus, TJ offered that:

> I can't say that I can point to things being done by the university specifically to help
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> retain me, and I know that sounds silly, but I don't really see this program as the same as
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> the university. I feel like we do our own thing over here, and the university isn't really
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> involved. Like I know the program is here at the university, but I just don't see them as
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> the same. The only people we engage with outside of this program are the people in the
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> Center, the president of the university, and one of the VPs. Which I think is a lot, don't
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> get me wrong, and they are nice and engaged, and I believe they care about us, but that's
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> just them because I can't really feel that across all parts of the campus, so yeah, I just
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> don't see them as the university, more like people who are genuine. Just like our program,
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> I just don't see it as a university thing because they really want us to do well in this
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> program and in the classroom, but I don't feel that from across the university.

This bifurcation that TJ speaks of feeds into how Interest Convergence shows up in these spaces and experiences and into the impact of programs such as this on the experiences of these participants. After sharing this response, TJ was asked to "expound on his response, specifically regarding what resources were available on his campus that would aid in his retention?" His response was interesting and did not change the sentiment he shared above. He stated that:

> Mr. Doss, if you're asking me if I knew about tutoring and things like that, then yes, I
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> knew about these things because the program shared these resources with us. I was just

never comfortable going into those spaces because I always felt like I was bothering people, you know what I mean? Like, they are wondering why I'm there, and I didn't like that at all. I shared this with the advisor for our program, and he made some phone calls and shared my experiences with some people, but I don't think anything came from it. I will tell you that a part of being in this program meant that I had to participate in study hall and that my grades were being checked. We talked about accountability on day one of the program, which helped me stay in school more than any tutor. And that's just me being honest.

Bob reaffirmed TJ's stance on this by stating:

Please don't judge me, but I graduated, and never, not once did I ever step foot in a tutoring center on campus. And let me just say that there were some semesters where your boy was struggling. Man, ain't nothing but God, I'm not even gonna lie. I didn't feel like those spaces were for me. You know what, I went down to that spot once, and there was a lady in there that looked at me dead in my face and told me that today they only had appointments and that they weren't doing walk-ins and that she couldn't help me. Man, I ran up outta there so quick and never looked back. And let me explain why, right? It's like she had no idea what I needed help with. She didn't even allow me to speak and share what was going on. She just went right to, "I can't help you." I'm not even saying that she wasn't right in saying they were only taking appointments, but keep in mind that the spot was empty, and not one person was in sight when I showed up.

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Based on their narrative, the overall campus environment around retention for this student was non-existent. In their experience, it felt as if they were bothering folks and were more of a burden to them. Bob supported this by also stating:

If someone comes into you and asks you for help, or even if they are trying to find the words to ask for help, wouldn't you want to make this easier for them? Especially if they are nervous or just overwhelmed. Why just brush them off? The least she could have done is said, "Hey, what do you need help with? We are only taking appointments right now, and we are booked up, but if somebody doesn't show up, you can take that spot or something, but she just made it seem like I was bothering her." When I go into the Center, it doesn't matter what's going on. They acknowledge me and other students, too, and ask if there is anything they can do to help us. Sometimes I just be going in there to kill time, others to feel like I belonged, other times it was justr to cool out and chill, and others, it would be to just feel like people cared about me. That meant more to me than anything else. So, no, the university itself didn't do anything to retain me; it was the people who worked in the Center and the people who interacted with our programs. Those people are the real MVPs. Ya boy wouldn't have made it.

Like Bob, Matt had similar experiences in retention, access, and being recruited. He shared that:

Again, man, night and day, my undergraduate experience when compared to my experience as a grad student. Mind you, I don't even think of the Center as a part of the campus. It's really like night and day, like zero comparison. I slept on the couch in that office so many times during my time as an undergrad when I was in between classes, and they never made me feel as if I was bothering them. Our program residing in that office

was a blessing because I could see the love and support of the people in that office; I could tell that they cared about us.

Seeing academic support as separate from the university was not unique to Matt's experience. Matt's experience, while his own, overlapped with Bob's, and this was evident when Matt shared that:

My tutoring and studying experiences were solely through that office because not even my own professors supported me the way this program and that office did. I tell no lie. Like, they had study sessions and tables, they held us accountable, they taught me how to tie a bowtie, they taught me how to use dining utensils and etiquette, they stayed on me about my grades, and they did so much to make my college experience what it was. If it wasn't for them, I would not have lasted as long as I did. They knew that I would struggle, and when that struggle came, they were there to catch me and help me. College wasn't easy for me, I'm not even going to front and pretend otherwise. I had to work very hard for every grade and for every experience. This program taught me that 'showing up' was half the battle; they allowed me to see success in my failures, and I'm forever thankful for that.

Ironically, while the question was focused on the retention experiences of the participants of this study, examples of how they were supported in non-academic ways, like Matt's experience above, were evident throughout the narratives collected from the participants. An example of this is Johnny sharing that:

Support for me did not exist outside of this program, and I'm not even exaggerating. The messed up part is that when we talk about this as a group of scholars, our advisor would

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share that the campus really cares for and values us. Outside of the president and another VP, we don't see faculty and staff going out of their way to engage with us. The Black Student group holds meetings weekly, and we reach out to different areas and people to have them come in and talk to us. Outside of the president and that VP, everyone seemed uncomfortable and like they wanted to be anywhere but in that room with us. We were told to extend "grace" and I hear that, but, naw, man, seeing these people just look uncomfortable being around black people, is also why I think so many Black people don't feel comfortable on campus.

Johnny's critique of institutional performativity – where symbolic gestures of care masked systemic neglect – prompted deeper analysis of how retention rhetoric diverged from lived realities. When asked to expand, he noted how performative equity initiatives demand disproportionate emotional labor from Black students while centering white comfort:

If you are uncomfortable being in a room with 20 people who don't look like you? How do you think students who don't look like you feel walking around a campus like ours where we don't see anyone who looks like us? People say things like, "Well, the president is Black, and we have Black administrators," but that doesn't mean anything. I mean, it does make us feel comfortable going to those people, but like I said, the president and the VP are cool cool, like cool cool, they stop and speak to us, well me at least, and other students, whether they are Black or White say the same thing, they don't seem uncomfortable dealing with us.

Johnny went on to share that the program provided support for him and others in the program in ways that his faculty and other staff do not. He stated that:

I swear, even some of my faculty act as if they are just not comfortable being around us, and it gives weird vibes. I'm not even gonna lie. So, as far as retention and support, this program is my squad; as my mentor would say, 'we are down for each other,' and that means we are to hold each other accountable and support each other as well. But yeah, my support comes from them and no one else, really.

When asked about his retention experience, King shared the same experiences as the other four participants in that he felt a level of support from the program and the Center that the program is housed in more than anywhere else on campus. He went on to share that this support served as one of the catalysts to his retention at his institution. He articulated this further with the following example:

Mr. Doss, I think I'm a pretty bright guy. School isn't super easy, but it's also not super difficult. I have great study habits, but there are some things that I need help with, and this program provided all of that and more to me. I think the university did the right thing in establishing this program because, you know, there is not a lot of support for Black students in general, but especially for Black male students. There are more Black women on campus than Black men, and I feel like the Black women on campus automatically flock to each other, whereas with the men, it was a little different. I know a few of my female classmates who have shared that they would have quit and left long ago if it weren't for their friends, and I feel that our group is the same. I feel I am able to share some of the things I have learned over the years with my fellow scholars, and I feel like I learn from them too, so we learn from each other, our advisor, and the people in the

Center, but we have a community, and that community is focused on Black Excellence in every sense of the word.

King's observation is interesting as it alludes to these inherent structures around the concept of community and how students engage with each other to find and establish that community, which is critical to their experiences.

While the questions in this interview were structured to gather the academic experiences around retention for this population, the data morphed into something greater. They exposed the underpinnings of the out-of-classroom experiences on retaining students, especially underserved or underrepresented populations. King made it clear that while he was academically savvy and had the skillset to be successful, this concept of community and the support garnered from that community is integral to his success on the campus. This concept of the "out-of-classroom experience" will be examined further in the following theme, as it focuses on mentoring for this population of students.

Theme: 4. Mentoring for this population

This study seeks to understand the impact this mentoring program has had or currently has on the lived experiences of the participants interviewed for this study. Scholars over the past decade have shared that "efforts to enhance the academic performances and educational experiences of Black males in college have 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 Mentoring (BMI) programs, which are primarily structured as social cohesion programs and intended to increase students' retention and graduation rates" (Brooms, 2018, p.141).

While the experiences of each participant are unique based on their cultural capital and background, there are overlapping similarities that can assist us in understanding the impact this can have on this population. The participants of this study all shared how impactful their experiences in this program have been in shaping their futures. When asked to expound on his response of "this program is top tier," TJ shared that:

> I'm so serious right now when I say this: I have a few internship opportunities lined up that are a direct result of being in this program. No one else on this campus has looked out for me this year. Mr. Doss, I'm the oldest among my siblings; graduating college is not the only goal, for real, for real; now that I've gotten to this point, the goal is really to get a job that pays so that I can help my family. Everybody has given me so much and put so much into me being here, like, that's my job to reach back and show them that this thing is possible because I know they believe it.

TJ's emphasis on the program's transformative impact – bridging academic opportunity with familial responsibility – emerged directly from its mentoring framework. He clarified how relational mentorship transcended transaction support, stating:

> I developed a different level of grind when I came into this program. Because I knew, based on how some people on this campus move, that they are watching us, watching us, and I refuse to be the fool who messes this up for everybody; honest to God, that has kept me going sometimes when I feel like spazzing out! I remember everything that this program and our advisor have done to make my life better, and I just tell myself, "Bro, chill, even if it's that deep, just chill because you're gonna make a bad situation worse if you go off."

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TJ's mentoring experience focused on academic navigation, cultural mediation, and professional socialization. Academic navigation involved structured guidance on course selection and research opportunities, while cultural mediation addressed racialized campus dynamics and identity negotiation. Professional socialization focused on networking norms and career pathways often inaccessible to first-generation students. These interactions, from formal sessions to informal exchanges, provided strategies to navigate institutional barriers. TJ emphasized the relational impact:

> In our mentoring sessions, we talk about emotional intelligence and righteous anger and things like that when we get together, and how, you know, chilling tf out, sorry, I didn't mean to cuss, even when you are disrespected, is the best approach to take as a Black man, surrounded by Whiteness. Because some people expect our aggression because that's the only emotion, they think we have, based on how they play in our faces. I'm from the 'hood, Mr. Doss. Disrespect is met with disrespect, regardless of the consequences. I had to move differently when I came here, and mentoring was what showed me that. Like I said, I have something lined up next year that will help me get to that money!

Like TJ, Johnny spoke a lot about how he has gotten access to many things because of the program. He stated that:

> You know who didn't know that you needed a butter knife when you ate dinner? Me (laughs). Bro, we use butter knives as screwdrivers in my house and for whatever else, but never to eat (laughs). If you had seen us all learning how the different forks worked and where they went on the table, you would have laughed; man, they brought out

something to cleanse our palettes, and fam to my right was like, 'Bruh, they mean, plates?

Coz tf is a pallet?" To this day we still holler behind this because, low key I was thinking

the same thing but didn't want to say nothing, yo, I'm still laughing, man, I'm still

laughing!

These experiential lessons in cultural capital extended beyond practical knowledge to create

authentic mentoring bonds. Johnny emphasized how this shared vulnerability – learning social

norms together – created relational trust critical to the program's impact:

Him and I became boys after that, because, aint no way we were sharing the same

thoughts. Come to find out, during our debriefing event the day after the event, all but

two of us were like, "Yeah, we gonna wait this one out and see what they talmbout, coz

what?" (laughs), man, the power of mentoring, sir, it's priceless, I can't even front,

because where else was I gonna go and get an etiquette class? Let's be for real nowhere;

I'm sure if you talk to any of the people in this program, they're gonna tell you that "they

did their big one with this program."

Johnny's sentiment about cultural capital acquisition through training highlights how the

program fills critical gaps left by institutional neglect. This experiential learning fostered peer

solidarity while exposing systemic inequities in assumed student preparedness. He further stated

the program's role in redefining success beyond academic metrics:

I remember the first time I heard the word diplomacy in our program. It sounded like we

needed to act like "pushovers" and not stand up for ourselves, and it wasn't sitting well

with me. Then, our advisor started to talk about the time and place for a thing, using our

best weapon, which is our minds, and how we have to be in control of our emotions as

society will count on us to go off. I remember having conversations about the school-to-prison pipeline and how we owe it to those who came before us as they went through the worst and endured physical violence to get an education, and it made me think to myself, "Could you have survived during those days and times?" And imma tell you now, Mr. Doss, I wouldn't have made it, ain't no way.

Johnny's reflection on historical educational struggles prompted deeper analysis of how systemic inequities persist through modern respectability politics. When asked to elaborate on this generational continuum of resistance, he stated how emotional regulation serves as both survival strategy and unwritten curriculum for Black male students:

People are freaking crazy, man, and I feel like while we don't go through the violence, at least not on campus, some people harbor some resentment towards us being here. Like don't get me wrong, there are nice people here, but there are also not nice people here, and sometimes it takes a minute to even get to the nice people. Outside of campus, hang it up; I have so many stories, man; we'll be here all night, trust me on this, and it ain't just me; if you talk to any Black person on this campus, I can guarantee, they're gonna share with you, that someone in this town has done some racist sh*t to them.

It was clear that mentoring had allowed Johnny to navigate some challenging times while on campus. He also shared the following:

It's messed up to think about all the things we have to be prepared to deal with, but yeah, mentoring and being mentored have saved a lot of these *sighs*, these, these people from getting cussed out or downright stomped. Because they play with you, and then when you react, you're the bad guy. The dude followed me and my girl in Target and wasn't even

shy about it; I asked if we could help him, and this MF said, "Do I look like I need help?"

and kept following us. I told her we were out and weren't coming back. They f'ed around

and found out though, coz she comes from money and her people don't play that, we got

an apology in writing from the store manager. But yeah, you didn't ask me all of that, but

I didn't snap because of mentoring.

When asked to unpack his mentoring experiences while being in the program, King shared that:

So, even though I had been exposed to mentoring before, I am really blessed to be in this

program because I'm making connections that I probably would not have made if I wasn't

in the program.

King's acknowledgment of expanded networking opportunities through the program highlights

its role in countering institutional neglect of cultural capital development. When encouraged to

elaborate, he revealed how strategic relationship-building within the program addressed systemic

barriers to professional access:

I have friends all over the U.S. and even Europe in college, and none of them even knows

what their president looks like. Since my freshman year in this program, I've had dinner

with our president at least 10 times and our vice president as well. We get invited to

events in the community and connect with community leaders; I was even at an event

where we had a conversation about voting and another about the relationship between

police officers and the community. Overall, I feel like the mentoring I got over the past

two years of being in this program is different from the mentoring I've received before

and even the mentoring I received from my dad and parents. I think my parents still try to

protect me from certain things, and we have honest conversations, but it's not raw.

King was asked to elaborate on what he meant by the experiences being different and what he meant by the conversation being 'raw,' to which he responded:

It took me coming to college to realize that I was really, really privileged; there is rarely a time in my life I can remember my parents telling me "no" when I asked for something. And let me explain my sister and I learned early that we have to function as a unit in our family, and that means we all have our own roles and things we need to do to make the family better. So, we did everything our parents asked us to do, got good grades, were good human beings, volunteered, were kind, helping others, so it's hard for them to tell us 'no' when we do everything they ask us to do. We also learned early that when we make mistakes, we should apologize, take ownership of those mistakes, and have a plan in place to address how we will fix any harm caused by those mistakes and try to repair any broken relationships that come out of the mistakes we made, right? So, listen to this, though, that's not how the real world works, Mr. Doss.

Again, King was asked to elaborate on what he meant by "the real world doesn't work like that, and he went on to share that:

Like, these people out here don't care about me, and my apologies, Mr.Doss. They want it back in blood; look at George Floyd, Sandra Bland, Philando Castille, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice, Mike Brown, and so many others. Apologizing won't save my life out here, and my parents prepared me for the real world, but they weren't raw with it. They didn't prepare me for the hate I would receive just for existing. They taught me to love and forgive, and sometimes, love and forgiveness can cost people their lives. The first time someone tried it on this campus was a dude in my class who showed up in a "White Lives

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Matter" shirt the week after I wore my "Black Lives Matter" shirt, and walked up to me

and said, "My life matters just like yours matter, if not more because I'm going to serve

my country." In that moment, I didn't go with love; I told him to "get tf out my face and

go on somewhere with his bullsh*t and do not say another word to me." This dude had

the nerve to act offended like he was actually offended. My parents shielded me from

that; not one person where I'm from, and I was one of 5 Black kids in my school, would

dare; my mom would have shut the whole school down and had a "developmental

conversation" that could involve the media and news outlets. I lowkey think no one

played with me and my sister, because they knew who our parents were, and my parents

are nice people and do a lot for our community.

King's account continuously reveals the link between aspirational parenting strategies and

systemic anti-Blackness – where respectability politics delay against racial capitalism's

dehumanizing aspects. His campus encounter exposed how structural violence demands survival

tactics unaccounted for in familial preparation. He expanded on this dissonance between

community values and institutional realities:

The mentoring experience here had me have deeper conversations around who I was,

how I showed up as a Black man on this campus, and how I should move; you know, my

parents gave me some of the resources, a lot actually, but this program and the workshops

and mentoring I got, had me listening to different experiences, and seeing the similarities

between my own experiences and the people who were in the program before me and

even some of our community members is different than anything my parents could have

taught me.

Matt's experience was similar to Johnny and TJ's, and he shared that,

> Mentoring saved my life, Mr. Doss. The mentoring I received through this program allowed me to apply for and obtain a graduate assistantship. The mentoring I received during my time in that program equipped me for a world I didn't even know existed. We had conversations around interpersonal relationships, not just to help us with our relationships with our girlfriends or even boyfriends but with the relationships we had with our boys, parents, professors, and everybody we encountered.

He went on to state that:

> I told you about me being a 5th-year senior because of an advising mishap, and please believe if it wasn't for the mentoring and coaching I received from this program, I would have crashed out on that woman and this school. My advisor pulled me to the side and had a conversation where he said, "Two things can be true at the same time, the advisor made a mistake, and it sucks, but you can make the best of the mistake and take on a minor and prepare for grad school." This is exactly what I did, and here I am with an assistantship. Mentoring and coaching showed me the big picture. Can you imagine if I had crashed out? Everybody would have heard about it, and no one would have wanted to offer me an assistantship, so I wouldn't be here right now. So, controlling my emotions and responses to things that really get me upset has been key to my success here, and that is not something I would have done without the guidance I received in this program or the mentoring and support my advisor provided me.

Like TJ, Matt, King, and Johnny, Bob believed the mentoring and coaching relationships he had established with his advisor and others affiliated with the program positively impacted his life's

trajectory, even after graduation. Bob, at the beginning of responding to the questions about mentoring, shared that:

> One of the men who was a panelist during one of our workshops actually hired me for the job I now have. I met him 4 years before even applying for this job, and I kept in touch. The rest is history. Had it not been for that initial meeting and for the relationship that my mentors in the program allowed me to make with this man, I would not have gotten this job, I am certain of it.

He went on to state that:

> My boss, when he hired me, said to my face, "I know the quality that comes out of that mentoring program; you guys are well-rounded and hard workers; you're qualified and capable, so it's a no-brainer!" I can't even tell you how that made me feel; I reached out to my mentor and also to my "Big" and was crying, like actually crying; that's the first time I remember crying. I cried again at graduation, but I got my job before graduation, so that was my first big cry, and I remember it. I have reached back since graduating and have been on a few panels. I even have a mentee in the program, and that's how much I believe in the power of mentoring. Without it, the man you see before you now would not exist in this form; I'd be a man, but not the same man I am now. I learned not only emotional intelligence but resilience and grit, as well as how to be in a space that makes you uncomfortable and rise to whatever level of excellence I set for myself. That was all because of mentoring and this program. I faced so many barriers on my journey on my campus that I don't think I would have preserved without this program and the Center.

The concept of barriers and how they are navigated came up several times during the interviews and will be examined in the upcoming section of this study.

Theme 5: Barriers to this population

Scholars have long shared that some level of misconception exists in how students from historically underserved or underrepresented populations are viewed and "othered" by the masses, particularly around belonging and their ability to be successful in academic spaces. Based on this, it is not uncommon to find that students, particularly the Black male students who were interviewed for this study, decided to self-isolate from the masses on their PWI campuses. Historically, these students have been excluded and isolated, leading to them creating spaces that were welcoming to them. Unfortunately, this space mainly exists among themselves through programs like this Black Male mentoring program; for example, "on many predominantly white campuses, black students increasingly are instituting a self-imposed segregation" (Feaginn et al., 1995, p. 91). students who choose this option of self-isolation, like the participants of this study, do so because they believe and have experienced enough to support their belief that they can only depend on themselves.

They lean on each other for informal knowledge and guidance, and their mentors and those they interact with provide them with formal tools to navigate the nuances of their campus.

During the interviews, barriers came up in almost every response that was given by a participant, particularly as it pertains to the cultural capital needed to navigate the newness of their campus. TJ shared that:

I know I keep saying that my relative came in clutch, but she really did. I probably wouldn't have known about this program without her pushing until maybe my sophomore

year, but I was able to get connected my freshman year because she did everything in her power to get me that support. My barriers were many, and a lot of them came from people just being weird, honestly. As a first gen student, there are certain things that I didn't know how to do, and I can take the blame for some of that because I wasn't always locked in; if I'm being honest, I let stuff from back home and what my people were going through to affect me, so there's some blame on me in that. But there were some faculty and some people who did not care.

When asked to expound on this, TJ went on to share the following:

I remember I was late on this one thing, and the lady that I was talking to tried to tell me it was like a state thing why I couldn't apply for a scholarship; the whole time, it was the school. Then she went on about it being fair to other students. I'm like, 'ma'am, my brother got shot, was in the ICU, I'm the oldest, I was away for a week, and I called and told ya'll I didn't have access to reliable internet and my information, and it's like ya'll don't care." It's not like I was just out here fooling around. Do you know what I mean? It's like they are robots and don't realize that life be out here lifing for us. We don't have the same issues and struggles, so I feel like her not being from where I'm from and not having anyone in that office who looked like me made her not really understand what I was saying. They don't get us and understand that sometimes equal treatment means we still get left behind because we don't have the same backgrounds as some of the people they deal with.

When asked if he felt that representation would have mattered in this situation, TJ shared:

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It does and absolutely did, I went to my advisor, who connected me with the president

that same day, the president then sent me to the Vice President. The Vice President was

able to walk me through an appeal process that this lady never even told me about, and

she helped me with that appeal. I sent it in and got those funds. Everything is not about

race, but I feel like when I showed this Black lady VP what I was going through and how

my brother almost died and is recovering and showed her my call to the school and how

long I stayed on the phone with them, she did everything in her power to help me. Is that

because she is Black? I don't know; I can tell you the White lady didn't care why I was

late with my information; she looked at me like, "Not my problem!"

TJ's experience around representation or a lack thereof, as well as feeling as if his voice is being

heard, was a common thread among the experiences these men had while on their campus. Bob

added to this narrative by sharing that:

I struggled in every aspect of life during undergrad, and I feel half of those struggles

came from barriers implemented by the school. I read all the emails and got things done

on time, but I was still so overwhelmed, and I want to share that I think some of the

people I was working with were just focused on dates and checking a box; there was no

human element to it. It's like, you miss this, then you miss your scholarship opportunity.

You need to refile your financial aid; here are the deadlines: cool, you need your parent's

tax information, ok, cool, what if they don't have tax information, and what if I can't get

access to it? No one talked to me about this. My advisor was able to get someone from

Financial Aid to come in and speak to our group about all the "what ifs," and that helped

me more than anything else. But why, why does it have to be him bringing these people

in to talk to us? Why wouldn't they do some workshops for people like me? It's like, you

keep telling me you care about me and people like me, but every time you get a chance to

prove that you really do, and it's not out of an obligation, you fumble the bag and make it

out to be this thing that is like checking boxes. We are not robots, man; we are human

beings, and we have to deal with people in this way, like they are human beings, and

listen to them and their voices when we make decisions that impact their lives.

Bob was asked to elaborate on this notion of his voice not being heard, and he responded with

the following:

It's the most frustrating thing on the planet to try and communicate with someone and feel

as if they're not trying to hear you or even care to understand what you are attempting to

say. This is how I felt when I had a difficult situation on that campus. If it wasn't for my

advisor and the fact that I am committed to supporting that program, I probably wouldn't

even deal with the campus. I have been hurt so much, man (laughs); some of these people

just have no feeling and heart and feel as if, if it's not on paper in front of them and not

something they can check off, then they can't do it.

Unfortunately, Bob and TJ's experiences were not unique to them, as when Matt was asked to

discuss his experiences with barriers, he stated that:

Barriers, barriers, man, barriers have been out here beating me up, and they're winning

(laughs). If I were built any differently, I would have dropped out and given up a long

time ago. My learning and growing as a person also meant knowing when to stand ten

toes down on a thing and when to just keep it moving. I shared my academic issue with

you, and while it worked out, I'm still bitter about it, and that's me being honest with you.

It still stings, even though it worked out. Imagine how many people drop out because of the very thing I went through, and there was no fixing it for me.

Matt went on to share the following:

In mentoring these new guys, I make sure one of the first things I share with them is, "Don't take nobody word for nothing, looking at your degree plan, no it back and front, make sure you are keeping track of your courses, because everybody makes mistakes, but I don't want you all to suffer the way I did behind someone else's mistakes." It's not to bad mouth anyone because I still have to work here, but it's more to warn them that they can't leave their destiny in nobody's hands because they're gonna be stuck with the consequences of a mistake they didn't even make.

Matt also shared that:

Think about it: you already don't have the money to pay for college, you feel as if nobody outside of the group you're in and the office that helps that group listens to you, and you end up in a situation where no matter what you do, the results are gonna be the same, and those results are going to cost you hella more money. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth, and I'm just protecting someone else from having to go through this.

Johnny mirrored Matt's sentiments around helping others to navigate the barriers he experienced and shared that:

I can tell you this: I know these barriers aren't going nowhere; these barriers have been around for a while, and I know this because the people who came here before me shared their experiences with me, and they are identical. Some of these people graduated over 10 years ago, so yeah, if people don't care, then they don't care, and I feel like it's a people

issue more than anything else. We have some good people on campus, but even good

people make mistakes and feel like they can never be wrong.

Johnny then stated that:

I know it's a big campus, and it's not like I want preferential treatment, but I feel like if I

wasn't a part of this program or even built a relationship with the staff in the Center, then

I'd be screwed. They saw in this world, "It's not just what you know but also who you

know," and this has been true for me because I felt comfortable going to my advisor

when I had a problem; I was able to get help with some of the things that were stressing

me out.

Having that help to navigate the nuances of college, whether it be barriers or wins, is an integral

part of mentoring programs like these, and Johnny reiterated this sentiment by sharing that:

My mentor and advisor are two of the best people I know, and what they have shared

with me and showed me will be something I can pass on to my family members when

they decide to come to college to better help them and also the younger guys who are

coming up after me. My advisor would sometimes say, "Not because you struggled

doesn't mean someone else has to struggle too; if you have the road map to success, share

it, and hope that the person you share it with shares it with someone else." He said it's the

idea that "each one, teach one!"

This collective desire to support others and to share with others was reiterated by King, who

indicated that he felt obligated to be someone who uplifts those who come after him. He was

adamant that his parents and grandparents instilled this mindset in him but that his advisor

reminded them of this often. To illustrate this, King shared that:

Barriers to education for Black people have been around since before my grandparents were able to go to school. Both my grandparents were the first to be a part of integrated schools and attended HBCUs because their parents wanted them to be safe, and the colleges that were not HBCUs were not welcoming and did not want them. They were told to "go where they are wanted and supported," and they did just that. So, while I told you that my parents did not prepare me in a "raw" way, they did share some of the struggles my grandparents and even they themselves went through, but in a way where I felt like "these things would never happen to me."

When asked how he has processed or navigated the issues that come up because of perceived barriers, King shared that:

I'm built different, Mr. Doss, I really am, I am not here to worry about nothing a hater or a racist gotta say or do, even if their actions impact me negatively, I'm going to find a way to beat them at their own game.

I asked King to expound on this, and he shared that:

Racism is at the heart of this thing and all barriers, Mr. Doss. Think about it: These people do not know me from the next dude on the street, and they treat me like they have been taught. They believe that I am poor, academically ill-prepared, come from a single-parent household, and probably even in a gang (laughs).

King went on to add:

I remember one time I had group work, and we were talking about the most influential people in my life. Now, I love graphic tees, and my shirt that day had "family over everything" written on it. So, I shared that, you know, my family as a whole, I can't pick

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one or the other. Well, the group was like, "You have to because that's what the assignment asked for." So, I'm like, "Bet, my dad, we not only look alike, but he's my best friend, and I go home just to hang out with him and my mom." You know this wench sitting beside me said, "Oooh, you have a dad and live with him? I would have never guessed and laughed." When I looked at her like she had lost her damn mind, she started to backpedal and act like I was the villain and started crying, talking about, "It was a joke." I'm like, "I don't even know you. Why would you think you could joke with me? Why was that the joke you felt you needed to make?" Now the whole group is looking at me like I'm crazy and I was two seconds from crashing out, but remembered that this is how they expect me to be. My emotions were not as important as hers, and my voice wasn't as important as hers. The part that tripped me out even more was when the other three people in the group reached out to me individually, apologizing but never said anything to her. I'm like, y'all are so lame, but whatever.

Being silenced and feeling as if their voices are not being heard or even not being as important as their counterparts on campus was also evident during the conversations with the participants of this study.

This came up as a barrier that, while salient at times, was just as detrimental to their psyche and success as students on their campus, and it was even shared by some of the participants that being silenced, whether directly or by proxy, especially in this way, impacted their mental health at times. Holistically supporting these students includes supporting their mental health and well-being as well. The participants' experiences with holistic support will be examined in the next section of this study.

Theme 6: Holistic support for this population

In examining the experiences of Black Male students who participated in this study, it became clear that there is some disconnect between how their campus as a whole saw and supported them when compared to that support and being seen by the individuals who were over the program; and the staff who operated the Center that the program was housed under. It became clear that these participants had experiences leading to a wide range of emotions that no one outside their program acknowledged. As you can imagine, this is problematic and detrimental to the students and their institution.

Not only are Black men underserved and underrepresented on college campuses but there is a range of stereotypes that they must navigate while on those journeys (McMickens & Palmer, 2024, p. 4). Additionally, because there is rarely any support for Black men on their respective journeys, and or their voices are not heard and silenced, they have become more vulnerable to stress and mental health disorders that oftentimes go unchecked (McMickens & Palmer, 2024, p. 8). This, when coupled with the reality that in the Black community, there is a stigma associated with seeking mental health help, as it is often perceived as someone, especially a Black man, being weak or not being able to do what is necessary to be successful, (McMickens & Palmer, 2024, p.10).

The participants of this study shared that there was a concerted effort to normalize the need for mental health, spiritual, and physical support around a wellness model and concept that most of them had not been previously exposed to. When asked to share their experiences with holistic support while on campus, the men all felt that the program supported who they were as a whole person. They shared examples of how the program advisor, through programs and

structured workshops, engaged them in experiences that allowed them to tap into all aspects of who they were, and this was done in a way that did not seem patriarchal but more wrapped in having an understanding of how to show up and take up space, while also building a toolkit that would help them even after they graduated.

Emotional intelligence came up often throughout the conversations with all five participants, and it was clear that this was one of the things the program felt was necessary for the mentoring and development of the men who participated. In giving his example of how he experienced holistic support through the program, TJ shared that:

I have never in my life heard mental health described as being a priority. I was raised and taught to toughen up, to figure life out, to not complain, and to make a way or find a way. And if I'm honest, that sh*t is exhausting and pisses me off. It's like my feelings and emotions should only be tied to hard things, and I can't feel true happiness because I'm worried about everything and everyone else, and bro, sometimes I used to just be so tired. I used to think that therapy and things like that was only for rich people (laughs), no lie, coz who can afford a therapist and what is a therapist, and what do they do with my business when I tell them? It was all foreign to me.

TJ was asked to expound on this, and he shared that:

The program introduced the idea of therapy to us in a way that wasn't scary at all. One of our workshops dealt with feelings. Man, look, we were in there laughing so hard because we were all like, "Feeling, I'm not talking to a room full of men about my feelings?" We carried on like some idiots, all macho and rah, rah, and acted like we were so tough the whole time we had feelings (laughs). They had the facilitator start by asking us to answer

simple questions like, "When I wake up in the morning, I feel…?" And we were all like, "This is easy" the whole time, bro, is Jedi mind tricking us into opening up to him and low-key to ourselves at the same time? It didn't happen in one workshop, but over the course of a month or so, I started to realize that I could feel other things than frustration and anger and that if I was struggling, I could talk to people who wouldn't spread my business to the world.

He also shared that:

This program also introduced me to the importance of spending time meditating, or as they told us originally, "Take the time to sit with yourself and try to clear your mind and focus on one positive thing." My mind is all over the place and this was difficult (laughs), but yeah, we even spent time with someone who talked to us about diet and how we should eat in the dining hall and how we should workout and all these things. It was all different at first, but we got into a rhythm, and now I do that stuff all the time.

This desire to support the student's mental growth was also reiterated by Johnny, who shared,

Mr. Doss, nobody around my way talked about mental health; the funny part is, I know a bunch a people who aren't right mentally, and being able to think about this in a place where I don't feel like anybody is going to judge me really helped me to see that some people are not mental there and we just walk around acting like they are.

Johnny went on to share that:

If you really think about how I grew up, we don't talk about our problems and share our feelings with anyone or each other, and that's because we don't want people in our business to judge us. I started to realize that I ain't had a conversation with no one I cared

about about nothing involving feelings, well, let me back up, the feelings we talked about

was all anger right, like if I was mad or something. We never talked about our hopes and

dreams outside of me going to college; you know, we were just focusing on surviving and

making it from one day to the next. This program gave me the chance to hope for

something else, and it also showed me that I could feel other things. So, check this out: I

know my mom loves me. I think she's said it to me before, and I know she'd die for me; I

won't get into that, but she has proven that she would, but I don't think I remember her

saying "she loved" out loud.

The power of being exposed to something different was also evident in the information the

participants of this study shared during their interviews. When asked to expand on expressing

love and how he became comfortable doing so, Johnny shared the following:

So, when I would go home, I would just start telling her that I loved her, you know, and

she would always ask, "What's wrong? Why are you saying that." And that messed me

up, man because my own momma feels that something has to be wrong for me to tell her

I love her. But you know what, after that first semester, she started to tell me it back man,

so this program and the support I get is not just helping me, but helping my family too,

and that's what's up.

Matt's experience was similar to Johnny's. When asked to describe his experiences or perception

around holistic support and how that has impacted him, he stated:

I'm in the position I'm in right now because, over my five years here, I was able to build

some tools that all involved me being intentional about my words and actions and not

reactive. Mr. Doss, I have been a reactive person all my life, but coming here and being

in this program helped me to see that being reactive can cause serious problems, and

that's tough to swallow, especially when all my life I have dealt with disrespect in a

reactive way.

Matt went on to share that:

I now realize that becoming a man means finding different ways to deal with my anger

and frustrations because I can't deal with things the way I have done in the past. This

program showed me how dangerous not having control over my emotions can be and also

showed me that I have a future that can be messed up if I react with anger in every

situation. This is something I'm still working on to this day because people are sometimes

just idiots and try to do stupid things that are sometimes racist, and I just have to figure it

out a different way.

During the interviews, it became clear that building a toolkit that assists with conflict resolution

was top of mind for the program's advisor. All the participants shared how doing this has

impacted not only their lives on campus but also their lives back home and even their

experiences outside of campus.

An example of the value associated with building a solid toolkit was shared by Bob, who

graduated from the university and spent all 4 of his years in the program. He shared that:

Every single thing I learned in this program has helped me to be a great progressional,

everything. From how to care for myself, how to deal with people who are unhinged, how

to deal with conflict, how to not take everything personally, and even when it's important

to speak up and use my voice. My advisor would talk about "time and place" a lot, and

also, "righteous anger' and "knowing which hill to die on." All of these things still serve

me today and help me, I pull on these experiences and see them as like trainings that I've had that has helped me. I still meditate and remember my advisor doing workshops for us about taking care of ourselves.

The participants of this study all expressed a level of comfort with being exposed to these new experiences that have fostered their holistic support while in this program. Bob went on to state the following:

Want to hear a funny story? I got my first pedicure and manicure a year or so ago, and it was uncomfortable but nice. Now, I go every two weeks. I'm a pampered man (laugh); people don't believe me when I say it's a part of my self-care routine; hey, man, women do it all the time; they know what's up; we men are just catching up (laughs). I spend time with myself, and I also go on solo vacations and recharge to deal with the craziness of my job and life.

Encouraging and making space for self-care as a component of the holistic support these participants received was also a common occurrence during this program. Moreover, it exposed most of these participants to experiences they had never had before.

All these men, except King, had not been exposed to therapy and meditation prior to this program. King, when describing his experience with holistic support, shared that:

Mr. Doss, ain't nobody has to tell me that I have had certain privileges; I'm aware of this, and I'm not ashamed of it at all. I've been in therapy since I was 12 because I told my parents that sometimes I didn't want to be alive. I promise I wasn't even thinking about, you know, like harming myself, but my mom, being who she was, insisted on me seeing someone, and I've had that therapist up until I turned 18 and then transitioned to an adult

one. When I started here, I was meeting with them once a month; at the end of the fall

semester, I went on an "as-needed basis" in April, I started questioning my life in a

different way, and I reached out again, and we've been meeting monthly again.

King went on to share that:

In my family, we talk about our feelings a lot; I have never ever in life doubted how

much my parents, grandparents, and family loved me. My sister and I are tight, one of my

best friends. I group chat with our parents stays popping. I talk to my mom, dad and sister

every day, and even my grandparents, even though they be walking around here booked

and busy, but I have them and they have me. And the conversations and workshops we

had in this program helped me to embrace this idea of being vulnerable to a wider

audience. We bonded over our shared fears and helped each other work through some

hard things, especially hard things that involved how this campus was and how we felt as

far as support. Our advisor is the best; he whips us into shape and shows us mad love,

like real love; he wants us to win. My parents think he's the best, too, and appreciate him,

and every time they're on campus, they make it a point to go and see him.

Summary

Throughout this study, two micro themes emerged as byproducts of the conversations

with the five participants: hegemony and imposter syndrome. While not central to the study,

these themes are salient enough to warrant being mentioned in the discussion section of this

study and additionally, having a better understanding of how these five participants navigated

what they described as "some of the most challenging years" of their lives shed additional light

on the gaps that exist in the support that is provided to students in this demographic and others who are from historically underrepresented or underserved populations.

A nuance exists between this campus and the campus community doing what they believe is right to support this population and the role Interest Convergence plays in the "why" of the program's existence. These participants felt that "why" to be self-serving, even though the individuals who supported them were authentic, caring, genuine, and wanted the best for them. One of the participants went as far as to say:

> I think they want to retain us because there is money attached to it, but there are not a lot of resources being put towards our program or even making other areas of campus more welcoming. So, do they even love us and want us here, or is it that it looks bad if we're not here?

This idea of Interest Convergence served as the catalyst for creating this program and its overall purpose. Hegemony and imposter syndrome play a role in these participants' experiences and lives, making this scholarship unique. Interest Convergence, Imposter Syndrome, and Hegemony through the participants' lenses will be discussed in the final chapter of this study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This qualitative narrative study was designed to explore the experiences of Black Male students who participated in a Black Male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest. The study was designed to understand how the participants experienced their campus as participants of a Black Male mentoring program through the lens of Interest Convergence. Using a narrative inquiry approach allowed this researcher the opportunity to identify the problems that existed, make predictions about the study, gather data that aligned with my predictions, and ultimately led to the coding and analysis of the data collected to see if the research questions posed could be answered, (Creswell & Guetterman, 2017, p. 7).

This concluding chapter discusses the major findings related to the literature, specifically concerning interest convergence and other aspects highlighted in the literature review. Additionally, the results will be analyzed based on the research questions posed at the beginning of the study. This chapter will conclude with an explanation of the limitations of this study, identify areas for future research, and provide a summary of the study itself. Before the summary, limitations, and areas for future research, the discussion around the study's findings will be highlighted. As shared above, these discussions will be guided by the four research questions that guided this study.

Research Question and Themes

The four research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest, determine their overall success while attending their institution?

2. What factors contribute to the successes and challenges of Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest?

3. How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest navigate social and academic interactions, whether they are positive or negative on their campus?

4. How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest perceive the support provided to them by their campus community?

Conversely, these research questions were instrumental in the development of the interview questions utilized for this study, which in essence led to the creation of the following themes that came out of the study:

1. Theme 1: Access to Higher Education for this Population,

2. Theme 2: Recruiting for this Population,

3. Theme 3: Retaining this Population,

4. Theme 4: Mentoring for this population,

5. Theme 5: Barriers for this Population,

6. Theme 6: Holistic Support for this Population.

The discussion that will ensue in this chapter will be done thematically to ensure that the holistic ideas that the participants of this study shared are captured in a way that emphasizes their narratives as they pertain to these themes.

Additionally, there will be conversations about two micro themes that keep popping up throughout the discussions with the participants: Hegemony and imposter syndrome. In addition to these two micro themes, there will also be a discussion about the theoretical framework and literature review utilized in this study. The theoretical framework for this study (interest convergence) will also be discussed.

Discussion of the Results

Hegemony

Before diving into the results, it is essential to articulate what is meant when the word hegemony is used in this study. Hegemony as a concept is straightforward and is credited to Antonio Gramsci and can best be described as leadership based on the sole consent of those being led; this consent is secured and supported by the diffusion and popularization of the worldview of the ruling class (Bates, 1975, p. 352). Perpetuating hegemony is not easy, but it has been embedded in modern society for centuries; in basic terms, the dominant group in society or an environment must not just win the struggle that comes with maneuvering and controlling resources and institutions, but they must maintain and advance their positions of power, they must also ensure that their success and wins are legitimate and germane to them maintaining that power.

Conversely, the dominant group must also give members of the aggrieved populations just enough possessions to feel supported and, by proxy, give up more of their autonomy.

Additionally, it requires the dominant group to construct and maintain relationships with antagonistic groups while working and strategizing to ensure that scenarios where they lived experiences of these individuals do not conflict with the dominant group's legitimizing ideologies. (Lipsitz, 1988, p. 147).

Imposter Syndrome

As was shared above, the second micro theme throughout the study was imposter syndrome. This concept was so glaring that it permeated every aspect of this study. While imposter syndrome showed up differently for the participants of this study, the consensus observed in this study was the feeling the participants had of not belonging and feeling as if they were less than because of their racial background. Discussing imposter syndrome in this study is essential, as was done above with hegemony.

In earlier writings, imposter syndrome is often referred to as the imposter phenomenon; this refers to an individual who doubts their skills, abilities, successes, and overall capabilities in life and feels as if they are not worthy or deserving of the things they had accomplished. (Parkman, 2016, p. 51). In essence, these individuals function in a space where they believe they are unworthy of any recognition or accolade they have earned and consider themselves frauds for leaning into their talents. This mindset also leads to these individuals believing in perfection rather than progress as they put an insurmountable amount of pressure on themselves to be perfect (Parkman, 2016, p. 53). As we progress through the remainder of this section, you will find that as hegemony and imposter syndrome are discussed with the research questions, there is a level of synergy between the experiences of these participants and how these micro themes show up in their individual and collective lived experiences.

Research Question 1: How do Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest determine their overall success while attending their institution?

The participants of this study defined success with fluidity, however, at the core of their definition is that they have overcome all the obstacles placed before them while on this journey. At times the participants defined success as their ability to navigate the intricacies that come with being a Black male student on a PWI. At other times, they defined success as their ability to navigate bigotry, racism, feelings of not belonging, and worthiness, and this to them is success. They also believe that their success would not be possible without the support of the Black Male Mentoring program. They get into college despite challenges, navigate the nuances of college life, despite barriers and challenges, and by their admission, have good grades, make connections internally and externally, and engage within their affinity groups and community.

Hegemony and Imposter Syndrome

Making the connection between the micro themes of hegemony, and imposter syndrome, and how it ties into **RQ1**, which asks, How do Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest, determine their overall success while attending their institution? The notion of success for the participants of this study varied, however, the common thread of how they determined their success at Spring Patch University, centered on the power dynamics between an institution and the student or students applying and gaining admission to that institution. Most of the participants in this study felt that the dominant members of Springpatch University did not want them to be a part of the campus community. While they did not feel welcomed and struggled with access, they felt inclined to

attend Springpatch University because of the impact attending college could have on their and their respective family's future.

All these participants were brilliant and brave. However, during our conversations it became evident that they felt an immediate disconnection from their campus because they did not belong. The participants felt disconnection from campus. This stemmed from a myriad of things, the main ones though were, (1) Not being recruited, and (2) Not feeling an immediate connection to their campus, and feeling isolated when compared to their White classmates. They all shared that the connections they made in the Black Male Mentoring program at Springpatch University saved their lives and identified some factors that contributed to their successes and challenges, some of which I will highlight in the next slide.

The study participants shared the familiar feeling that they were not wholeheartedly welcomed on campus. TJ, Johnny, Matt, King, Bob, and shared some common trauma around the unique challenges that arose from their interactions with issues of racial discrimination, feelings of isolation, and lack of representation. In response to these challenges, names valued and sought to protect and engage with the mentoring program they were involved in on campus, designed for Black male students. They all shared instances of not feeling as if they belonged and believed that the mentoring they received through their program was tailored specifically for them and provided them with invaluable resources like academic support, personal development, and community engagement, to them, feeling connected to the Black Male Mentoring program at Springpatch University equates to them being successful – because they persevered.

Several participants believed that they were undeserving of their successes and credited their success as college students, and in some cases, graduate students and even a graduate of the

program with a successful life and career to the program, to their advisor, and to the individuals who worked in those offices. This feeling stems from the hegemonic environment they occupied and continue to occupy at Springpatch University. So, in essence, these participants believe that these mentors and advisors are responsible for their [the participants] overall success while attending their institution. Some of these participants had been exposed to mentoring before attending their university. They believed that mentoring at this level was the glue that held them together during the hard times they faced on campus.

TJ, Matt, Johnny, Bob, and King clearly defined their experiences within their community with their advisor, mentor, and campus community. They expressed feelings of belonging when they engaged in their smaller group but felt out of place and lacking when they engaged with the larger campus community. They explicitly shared examples that illustrated that their imposter syndrome, while self-imposed, was fueled by the lack of care they felt from their larger campus community.

Additionally, specifically as it pertains to hegemony and the power dynamics between these students, who are in the non-dominant group and their larger campus community, and decision-makers who exude a level of power that is sometimes invisible, throughout the interviews, they directly and indirectly shared that they believed their success and well-being were prioritized by their advisor and those who mentored them through this program. These individuals consistently and successfully reminded them that they belonged and helped alleviate some of their struggles with imposter syndrome.

These participants did not name hegemony or imposter syndrome as "things" that impacted them during their interviews. However, the examples they shared and the way they

narrated their experiences made it clear that these things were present and impacted their overall experience on their college campus. They also clearly articulated this mentoring program's impact on mitigating problems they encountered on their journeys. Based on their narrated experiences, this mentoring program played a crucial role in fostering their success as Black male college students through the various programs and workshops afforded to members of that program. The participants also clarified that while the academic support they were provided – as participants of this program – did wonders for their academic achievement, guidance was offered regarding their career paths and social and emotional development, which they welcomed but did not expect.

They believe their success at Springpatch University was evident in their desire and ability to survive regardless of the microaggressions, bigotry, and overall hostile environment often present when engaging with their campus community outside the program. TJ, Johnny, Matt, Bob, and King all believed that their success in this program correlates directly to those who served as mentors and advisors. Based on their narrations, they felt connected to their mentors because they saw them as human beings and shared similar backgrounds and experiences.

In short, the mentoring relationship allowed these students to be mentored in a culturally responsive environment that addressed these Black male students' unique needs and challenges at their PWI. This exposure to culturally responsive mentoring helped mitigate issues, such as knowing when to walk away from problematic situations and stand up to issues that impact them and those in their affinity group. Culturally responsive mentoring also allowed them to know when to ask for help and helped them to deal with feelings of isolation and unworthiness. Most

of these issues were tied to racism, classism, and Interest Convergence was present in the participants' dynamics with Springpatch University. These relationships built over time helped with the disruption of these students feeling as if they lacked or were being used to push forth an agenda tied to retaining students from historically underserved or underrepresented populations.

Research Question 2: What factors contribute to the successes and challenges of Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest?

The participants shared that the following factors contributed to their successes: finding community among themselves, being supported by the mentoring program and external mentors, finding a connection within their affinity group, knowing without a doubt that the mentoring program cared for them and would support them. They also shared that the following factors contributed to challenges they faced on campus: not feeling welcomed by the entire campus community, feeling isolated from their campus, not feeling as if they were providing value to their campus community, outside of their affinity group.

Hegemony and Imposter Syndrome

The connection between hegemony, imposter syndrome, and **RQ2,** What are some factors that contribute to the successes and challenges of Black male college students in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest?

The participants shared that they consistently felt they had to justify their presence on campus. They explained that they were accepted to Springpatch University because they had the grades to be admitted, while still wanting to stay there. They shared having feelings of inadequacies when compared to White colleagues who were recruited to Springpatch University.

Getting to campus and seeing the ease with which their colleagues navigated campus often solidified their feelings of not belonging, especially regarding navigating college. The Black Male Mentoring program helped with their confidence, and all the participants highlighted that having this confidence contributed to their successes. The program also gave them the tools necessary to navigate the social and academic landscape at Springpatch University.

When unpacking the factors that have contributed to the successes and challenges of these active students in this mentoring program, the common theme around success was the program itself, their mentors, their advisors, and the individuals who worked in the center where the program was housed. When examining what factors led to or contributed to their challenges, it became clear that their institution's inability to see and support them was the primary catalyst for these challenges, however, there were safety nets, right? The experiences of these participants were aligned, and this alignment became evident when their responses highlighted the intersecting factors that influence their academic success and well-being.

These factors include experiences centered on racial discrimination, stereotype threat, lack of representation, and feelings of isolation. All of these served as barriers to success and achievement for the participants of this study. This mentoring program not only provided these participants with a supportive environment within their campus community but also affirmed them and helped them build a toolkit that has led to and is leading to their overall success.

As was shared above, the participants could not name "hegemony" and "imposter syndrome" as factors that impeded their success. However, the words they used to narrate their experiences highlight these two things as being hindrances to their success. Somehow, they all minimized their value and worth regarding successfully navigating college, which clearly

indicates imposter syndrome. Conversely, they identified in multiple instances that the support

they received around academic support, relationship building, creating community and

developing a sense of belonging, and career readiness were authentic because it came from the

mentoring program, their advisor, and the individuals who assisted with the center that housed

their program.

The participants of the study directly stated that their campus community only cared

about them because of the program's success and high retention rate. They also felt that the larger

community's lack of investment in their well-being meant they were likely being used to bolster

diversity numbers. Again, this aligns with the concept of hegemony and how it shows up in the

relationships between non-dominant groups and those with structured power.

The challenges faced by the participants in this mentoring program included but were not

limited to feelings of isolation, imposter syndrome, microaggressions, and systemic barriers

within their institution. Additionally, they highlighted the need for and importance of additional

support services from the campus, cultural representation across all aspects of the university, and

resources to address these challenges and create a more inclusive campus environment. They

shared that in the absence of these aspects, they have relied heavily on each other and their

community of mentors, and all articulated that mentorship was the most valuable resource that

helped them to mitigate and, in some cases, overcome obstacles, build resilience, and achieve

their academic and personal goals.

Notably, some participants shared during their interviews that they did not know how to

establish goals before joining their mentoring program, as their focus has primarily been on

surviving and making it from one day to the next. This mentoring program allowed them to

imagine a life past their tomorrow and helped them to establish goals they could execute when the time came.

Research Question 3: How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest navigate social and academic interactions, whether they are positive or negative, on their campus?

The participants shared that they navigated the social and academic interactions on their campus by: putting themselves "out there" even though they do not necessarily feel welcomed, leaning on each other, being their brother's keeper, holding themselves and each other accountably, showing up to study halls and other programs through the Black Male Mentoring program and the center that houses the program, goal setting, and staying connected with mentors both on campus and off campus.

Hegemony and Imposter Syndrome

The connection between hegemony, imposter syndrome, and **RQ3,** How do Black male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest navigate social and academic interactions, whether they are positive or negative on their campus?

This connection was tied to the perception that an education can change the trajectory of their lives, these scholars endure instances of racism, microaggression, and othering, all of which contribute to them remaining at Springpatch University. Additionally, hegemony showed up as not feeling as if they belonged, which was centered in all the responses these participants provided during their interviews. While a few were self-aware and confident in who they were, they still felt they did not belong at Springpatch University. While they engaged with their

external campus community, they never thought that they could be themselves, because of the stereotypes that are oftentimes associated with Black Males. This feeling of belonging was also present in the responses that participants shared around the support provided to them by their university, and I will highlight their thoughts around this in the upcoming slides.

The participants of this study indicated that the mentoring program created for Black male students on their university campus provided valuable support and guidance that allowed them to navigate their experiences as college students successfully. As it pertains to how they navigate their social and academic interactions, these participants were often faced with a myriad of challenges, namely those related to or connected to feelings of isolation, microaggressions, and a lack of cultural affirmation. These challenges impacted their academic performance, sense of belonging, and overall well-being on campus. This was magnified by the presence of hegemony, which is the notion that the dominance of a particular group's ideology or culture takes precedence over that of the non-dominant group. This further compounded these challenges for the participants in this study, ultimately limiting their ability to seek agency and opportunities for success.

Again, these instances were mitigated by the individuals who provided them with mentorship and support. Imposter syndrome was also a common experience among the students who participated in this study. At its core, imposter syndrome refers to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt despite evidence of one's accomplishments and abilities. These students experienced imposter syndrome due to internalized negative stereotypes and external pressures reinforced by hegemony to perform at a high level, often in an environment lacking support and representation.

This study's participants described positive interactions, such as supportive relationships with peers and mentors, and hostile interactions, including experiences of microaggressions, racial stereotypes, and exclusionary behaviors on campus. The presence of hegemonic structures and attitudes within the institution often influenced the nature of these social and academic interactions and created spaces that did not welcome these scholars.

These participants did well and are continuing to navigate the complexities that are byproducts of an environment shaped by hegemonic structures and imposter syndrome. The supportive relationships, mentorship, and community within the mentoring program served as a vital resource for these participants and, by extension, their families, who sometimes benefited from what these students learned within their program's structure.

Research Question 4: How do Black Male college students who participate in a Black male mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest perceive the support provided to them by their campus community?

The participants of this study perceived the support from their community in the following ways: support was nonexistent, inconsistent, and not holistic, as outside of the Black Male Mentoring program, and the office that supported the program, the support from the campus was non-existent. The participants also felt that Springpatch University only cared about their existence when it benefited the university; for example, they asked representatives of the program to be present for programs where the presence of Black students would look favorably on the university.

Hegemony and Imposter Syndrome

The connection between hegemony, imposter syndrome, **RQ4,** How do Black male college students who participate in a Black Male Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest perceive the support provided to them by their campus community?

Ultimately, the participants of this study felt that their usefulness to their campus was surface level. Most interactions outside of their program and the center that supported the program were transactional and out of the necessity of having "diverse" representation. Additionally, some of the participants often felt that they were not worthy of any level of support because they were not wanted or needed on campus when compared to their White counterparts, or even female presenting students from other historically underserved populations. They felt that if they desired to be accepted and seen by their community positively, they had to change who they were and assimilate to how people wanted them to be.

This idea of assimilation and the notion that those from historically underserved populations have to fit in and are othered by a system that was not created to see them succeed and a system that provides breadcrumbs in resources, while pretending to offer help and support is the core of Interest convergence. This framework was used in this study. Over the upcoming slides, I will unpack IC with the 6 main themes that arose from this study.

One participant said: "They have to give us more than thoughts and prayers for me to believe them when they say they care about us." This quote from Matt sums up how these participants presented their overall experience with support from their broader campus at Springpatch University. The quote speaks to the heart of how these participants viewed the

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support they received from their wider campus community. It seemed strange when the participants separated their program from the broader campus. There appeared to be a disconnect between the participants, their program, and their campus community. This means that the Black Male Mentoring program wanted to connect with them, and the Black Male Mentoring program valued them, but this was not the sentiment they felt when engaging with their campus.

As the interviews progressed, that disconnect became more evident, and there was narrative data to support why this clarity was present. The institutional-student experience disconnects emerged through participants' narrative accounts of contradictory practices – diversity branding versus under resourced support services and recruitment-retention misalignments. This pattern aligns with Interest Convergence theory (Bell, 1980), which states that equity efforts advance only when serving institutional interests, such as reputation management, over systemic reform. The clarity came as these participants spoke of the landscape of being in a historically underserved or underrepresented group on a campus infused by the complexities within the landscape of social and academic interactions on a college campus. Again, hegemony refers to the dominance of a particular group's ideology or culture within a society, while imposter syndrome entails feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt despite external success.

These participants made it clear that they had multiple and consistent engagements that directly or indirectly tied into issues of racial discrimination, microaggressions, and a lack of representation within the academic and social environments at the institution was glaring. Hegemonic structures within their institution further perpetuated these challenges, as dominant narratives and norms did not adequately reflect or support the experiences of these participants

and students who shared their cultural capital. As a result, TJ, Matt, King, Bob and Johnny felt

marginalized and overlooked within their campus community, and this, in essence, impacted

their sense of belonging and made them think, for the most part, that their campus did not care

for them, nor were they seen as a priority to their campus.

During these experiences or encounters, the participants shared that their feelings of

imposter syndrome became significant. They had moments when they started to internalize these

stereotypes and external pressures, all of which added to their stress.

Despite their accomplishments, these participants struggled with worthiness and felt fraudulence

and inadequacy. These feelings were exacerbated because their environment lacked full

representation and support. This was a continuous cycle of self-doubt and anxiety for these

students, but again, these feelings were mitigated by the mentorship they received because of this

program. Ultimately, the mentoring program filled a gap due to the dominant cultural norms on

their campus not accounting for the diverse experiences of the participants of this study.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature and Theoretical Framework

Interest Convergence has infused into the six themes from the data analysis for this study.

Interest Convergence scholars argue that anything that is done to support Black students or

students from any underserved population is done only because doing this ultimately benefits

White people or those who have the most power in that system or structure (Bell, 1980). Interest

Convergence (IC), a tenant of CRT, was used as the framework for this study because it

highlights the impact that power and privilege have on issues of equality in this country.

Self-service is at the center of IC, meaning how the stakeholders of an environment

perceive those with power can impact how those stakeholders engage with that environment,

particularly regarding addressing and mitigating glaring issues that cannot be sequestered. This is especially true if it involves or relates to a group of people's right to exist. Moreover, inaction is just as bad for business. It can lead to being judged in the court of public opinion, which can negatively impact those with power in a hegemonic environment and removes some of the invisible thread that fosters imposter syndrome in the minds and hearts of people from historically underserved populations. This means there is a balance between doing enough to seem as if there is care and concern for this population and the notion that not enough is being done whether this is because of a lack of desire to do so, or the inability to disrupt a system that was built to exclude these students and others from historically underserved populations.

While some scholars argue that the language used around CRT and theories that are tenets of CRT are used to maintain white privilege (Ladson-Billings et al., 1998), the language is needed to ensure that the issues identified in CRT can be named. Potential solutions to mitigating these issues can be identified. Overall, CRT supports the argument that while overt forms of racism were addressed through some of these laws that were passed in the 1960s, the systems that allow racism to gain power and traction were never restructured, so the first step to understanding issues around race in this country is to accept those laws aside, everyday racism is still alive and well, and impacts the lives of marginalized people (Lyn et al., 2006).

The literature review was done thematically, which means the themes outlined below were outlined in the same format in that chapter. The information shared in this section will also be structured thematically. the themes are,

1. Access to Higher Education for this Population,

2. Recruiting for this population,

3. Retaining this Population,

4. Mentoring for this population,

5. Barriers for this Population, and

6. Holistic Support for this Population.

Interest Convergence and Theme 1: Access to Higher Education for this Population

Gatekeeping by those in power and the lack of equity often present in how historically underserved or historically underrepresented students gain access to higher education institutions were present throughout this research. The literature around access to higher education is insurmountable; however, seldom do you find studies that focus on the agency of these students when they engage with their campus communities.

Throughout this study, the participants were clear in narrating the fact that accessibility is still not as easy as most people are making it out to be, especially as it pertains to Black men, who are at the lower end of the totem pole when it comes to accessing higher education and the resources needed to navigate this journey successfully (Harper, 2019). Most participants in this study alluded to their lack of belonging when engaging with their campus.

The question can be asked, "then why did they come?" The response to this query, for most of, if not all these participants, was that this was their only and most viable option to actualize a dream that, in most cases, they did not have. While they were not welcomed, there were conversations around retaining this population of students and even tokenizing them in some cases. This means, Interest Convergence and hegemony were present in the transactional way that these students engaged with individuals at Springpatch University who were not in the Black Male Mentoring program. This idea of tokenism is the catalyst behind IC's role in

understanding the power dynamics between these participants and their campus communities external to their mentoring program.

There is a shared belief by the participants of this study that the access they have been afforded is conditional and tied to the fact that they are suitable for the "numbers" game that universities are about when it comes to funding and being perceived as having some level of diversity. This ties into the next theme, which is recruiting for this population.

Interest Convergence and Theme 2: Recruiting for this Population

Interest convergence and the mindset that the reason these students are even sought after is to help with their overall diversity numbers is not a far-fetched idea. Ironically, all the participants in this study, except for one, were not even looked at/recruited by their university; they became students because of happenstance. These students were academically equipped to navigate this campus successfully but, for some reason, did not check the boxes that were required to be recruited for their campus. The parameters for recruiting and admitting these students needed to be clarified during their interviews, outside of what is listed on the university's website. They needed to figure out how those decisions were made, and based on those requirements, all the participants should have landed in the pool of students who would be recruited for this university.

The experiences of these participants are not uncommon or unique, especially for students from historically underserved or underrepresented populations. An article about counselors' ability to increase African American males at a private college observed that "admissions counselors lacked the necessary confidence to recruit African American males to the university effectively" (Brewer, 2018, p. 20). This indicates a significant gap in the number of

Black males being recruited to this university, as, based on this study, they are not being

approached and, in essence, do not otherwise have exposure to this higher education institution.

Whether this is by design or done inadvertently, the outcome is clear, these students are

helpful to their campus, but were not recruited and feel they do not belong and are not

wanted. So, it seems that it is self-serving to recruit members from this community without

genuinely wanting them to be a part of that community. It seems that perhaps doing so aligns

with the concept of interest convergence. To account for not being recruited, one of the

participants shared:

> "Mr. Doss, they don't want me at their school. Low-key, they don't want none of us at this
>
> school. It doesn't matter what they say; they show me daily that they don't. Thank God
>
> for my advisor and the center."

Another participant shared about the recruitment process:

> "I just figured they had enough of us here, so they decided that was enough and stopped
>
> recruiting us, and I was one of the people on the other end of that cutoff (laughs)."

Whether it is a lack of experience with recruiting this population or a lack of desire to do so,

these participants felt that their sole reason for gaining access to their institution, as they were

not recruited formally, is tied to the university gaining some benefit from their presence on

campus.

Interest Convergence and Theme 3: Retaining this Population

Understanding how funding works at the state level for this institution made it clear that

interest convergence is at play when unpacking how retaining this population impacts the funds

that the university receives for these efforts. Scholars have long argued that "despite colleges'

efforts to be inclusive, discriminatory acts still occur on college campuses. Research has shown that campus racial climate contributes to the retention of students of color within the college" (McClain and Perry, 2017, p. 2). This research supports the findings of this study, as the participants believe that the only interest the university has in them is purely surface-level and financial. The participants did not feel they belonged outside of their affinity group, which means, if there is no intentional effort to ensure that campuses are safe and welcoming to students like the participants in this study, they will not be retained.

The participants in this study shared that outside of the community they created among themselves via the mentoring program and selected individuals who cared for and supported them, they did not feel they belonged. This mentoring program and its mentors were the key ingredients to them being retained at their campus. One of the participants went on to share that the campus participated in a climate survey a few years ago, where they asked questions about the experiences on campus; he shared that he was in a class when a professor was discussing that the results were shared with the community, and was sharing with the class, at a high level, those findings. The participant shared that one of the students stated, after the professor shared the numbers, "sounds like a win-win, we are not too gay, and we are not too racist," and laughed. He said the professor did not correct the student, and when the participant said, "That is a dumb thing to say," everyone, even the professor, made it seem as if he was out of line to respond in the way he did.

Again, if there is no intentional effort to ensure that campuses are safe and welcoming to students like this study's participants, they will not be retained. Other scholars have also shared in their research that "African American students that enroll at predominantly white institutions

have expressed their feelings of ostracism and lack of sense of belonging" (Eakins & Eakins, 2017, p. 56). The participants in this study shared that outside of the community they created among themselves via the mentoring program and selected individuals who cared for and supported them, they did not feel they belonged. This mentoring program and its mentors were the key ingredients to them being retained at their campus. This leads to the next theme discussed: mentoring for this population.

Interest Convergence and Theme 4: Mentoring for this Population

The participants all felt that the space created for them to engage with each other and other like-minded individuals through a shared lived experience was priceless. They all articulated that this feeling did not expand past the mentoring program to the campus community. They also shared that engaging with this mentoring program, their advisor, and the individuals in the center that housed the mentoring program were the only reasons they stayed. The relationships they built within those communities helped them to navigate racism, microaggressions, disrespect, bigotry, and even being misadvised. The impact of mentoring on the lives, lived, experiences, and overall success of the participants of this study was astounding. The participants ranged from students still in undergrad at this institution to those in grad school, those who graduated, and those who have acquired successful employment. The participants all felt that the space created for them to engage with each other and other like-minded individuals through a shared lived experience was priceless. They all articulated that this feeling did not expand past the mentoring program to the campus community.

The relationships they built within those communities helped them to navigate racism, microaggressions, disrespect, bigotry, and even being misadvised. They mentioned that their

advisor was running a "one-man shop," but you could never tell because so many people were being brought in to engage with them who shared their lived experiences and could relate to them were endless.

They all agreed that this advisor worked overtime to ensure they were exposed to greatness. As one participant shared:

> It was great to see Black excellence all around me at times; I mean, sometimes it was overwhelming, no lie, seeing all these successful Black men telling us everything they went through and thinking, man, that is exactly what I am going through, and feeling as if they understood me and did not think I was doing too much. You know, they got it and did not think I was crazy.

Conversely, although the institution provided a space for the participants of this study to meet and engage with each other, the program's success was contingent on Black males volunteering to engage with these participants (McCray, 2002, p.84).

Again, this is one of the ways that interest convergence shows up, with the dominant group benefiting from the "labor of duty" that these volunteers need to do. These participants felt that the mentoring they gained from this program was done by individuals who wanted to give back and make their experiences better than their own. They felt that their relationships with these mentors would last a lifetime and have been invaluable. Funds are limited and restricted, but these students think that the university invested in what they felt was essential to the institution, and the lack of full-time support from their advisor indicates that this program is not a high priority for the university. This lack of support ties into one of the barriers this population experiences, which will be discussed next.

Interest Convergence and Theme 5: Barriers for this Population

Interest convergence shows up in this conversation around these barriers because there is a lack of intentionality in how the administrators at the university that these participants attended approached removing the barriers that existed and negatively impacted the experiences of these students. Having a conversation that focuses on persistence and retention while not discussing barriers means that the student's success is being placed on the student alone, and no conversations are being had about the responsibility of the institution to remove the obstacles and give students the tools needed to be successful. Conversely, creating a community is a significant part of providing holistic support for these students, and holistic support will be the final theme discussed through the lens of interest convergence.

While there are consistent and interchangeable conversations around persistence and retention, there is little or limited conversation around how best to remove the existing barriers that require students to persist and be retained, as not all these barriers can be controlled by the students themselves. This observation around the use of persistence and retention is supported by scholars who argue that "both persistence and retention have been used interchangeably throughout the literature in higher education" (McElderry, 2022, p. 37).

This acknowledgment indicates that persistence and retention are how administrators view students' experiences, like the participants of this study. Interest convergence shows up in this conversation around these barriers because there is a lack of intentionality in how the administrators at the university that these participants attended approached removing the barriers that existed and negatively impacted the experiences of these students. Focusing on the obstacles that exist instead of focusing on strategies to remove these systematic barriers is not only a gap

in the research but also a way to provide tacit approval for the inequities that continue to plague this population of students, "while there are numerous reasons that contribute to Black college males departing from college before earning a college degree, there are visible and present reasons that are beyond the control of Black males" (Ottley & Ellis, 2019, p. 73), administrators refuse or fail to recognize those issues as significant concerns.

As was shared above, having a conversation that focuses on persistence and retention while not discussing barriers means that the student's success is being placed on the student alone, and no conversations are being had about the responsibility of the institution to remove barriers and give students the tools needed to be successful. Conversely, creating a community is a significant part of providing holistic support for these students, and holistic support will be the final theme discussed through the lens of interest convergence.

Interest Convergence and Theme 6: Holistic Support for this Population

Conversations about the presence or inclusion of historically underserved or underrepresented students, particularly concerning these participants, have been conducted through a deficit lens. The focus is often on what needs to be done for these students to fit in, not on the value these students who participated in this study can add to the environment that they are occupying. This is problematic and relates to the concept of interest convergence, as the sole reason these participants feel they occupy their spaces is that the university benefits financially from their retention. All participants in this study have indicated that they did not feel sufficiently welcomed to engage with the broader community without their mentors and advisors present, and they felt more like a burden than a benefit to their campus, especially during discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which were topics of discussion.

There is little to no value placed on them as human beings, and the value their cultural capital can add to their campus. To support the value and importance of humanizing the experiences of these students, scholars have long shared that "attending college with those of other races and ethnicities increases the likelihood that students will socialize across racial lines and talk about critical matters" (Chang, 2001, p. 10). The benefits and values of exposing students to a global experience are priceless. While institutions talk about preparing students for a global economy, the work done on campuses, like the one my participants are a part of, seldom reflects this work meaningfully.

This desire to prepare students for a global economy hinges on academic preparation and not on soft skills and the ability to engage with a diverse group and background of people. The participants of this study have all indicated that they did not feel welcomed enough to engage in the community at large without their mentors and advisor being present and felt as if they were a burden instead of a benefit to their campus, especially when issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion were topics of discussion. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss how this lack of being seen as a benefit to the campus, among other things, is tied into the limitations of this study. Next, I will address the limitations of this study.

Limitations

This narrative study examined the personal and lived experiences of Black Males who participated in a Black Male Initiative/Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest. Interest Convergence was used as the framework in this study, and this theory is a tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Based on this framework, one of the assumptions I made is that some of the experiences these students had within their campus community were based on

the belief that their campus communities will benefit equally, if not more, from those experiences. This assumption was proven to be true.

However, it is important to note that because this study was conducted using a narrative inquiry, the sample size was a small portion of the Black males on that campus and even a smaller sample when looking at the population of underserved and underrepresented students. Additionally, this study only examined students' experiences at this specific institution and focused on a particular population. This data can perhaps be used as a benchmark that adds to the discourse and literature around the experiences of Black male college students who engage in mentoring programs. In essence, I did not look at, nor am I sure of, how other marginalized populations experienced this campus community, as they were not included in this study.

This study was conducted using a narrative inquiry, the sample size was a small portion of the Black males on that campus – approximately 2% of the campus population identifies as Black and male. This study only examined these students' experiences at this specific institution and focused on a particular population. This data can perhaps be used as a benchmark that adds to the discourse and literature around the experiences of Black male college students who engage in mentoring programs. Despite these limitations, one main desire is to see this work used to improve the experiences of these participants and others who share their cultural capital. Better means doing the work necessary on that campus and other spaces to disrupt systematic barriers that have hindered or eliminated these students from the campus' ecosystem.

So, while this study will serve as a tool, it may be challenging to use the information to give a general overview of similar participants in similar programs at different institutions or

even a general overview of the larger population of students at this institution, as these additional populations were not included in this study.

Implication of the Results for Practice

Regarding the implication or impact of this study, one central desire is to see this work used to improve the experiences of these participants and others who share their cultural capital. Better means doing the work necessary on that campus and others to disrupt systematic barriers that have hindered or eliminated these students from the campus ecosystem. This is not to say that nothing is being done but that more needs to be done. Unfortunately, this is not to absolve this campus from its responsibility of doing better; external factors also impact how students from historically underserved populations are supported. For example, in the summer of 2023, the Supreme Court ruled to overturn the law that allowed affirmative action to be utilized in the college admittance process. This, along with other policies that impact the lives and lived experiences of historically underserved students, are now engrained in the fabric of this country in a different and arguably more divisive way. As access for historically underserved populations, I fear will be negatively impacted by laws and policies such as this.

This being said, institutions have to do more, within the confines of the law, to support the students they acquire on their campuses, and in the case of the institution that the participants of this study attend, it starts with ensuring that the relationships we establish with students are relational and based on building solid relationships and not just transactional because this is how they feel. The hope is that data is gathered and examined, and tangible ideas are created to help with the creation and execution of strategies that enhance mentorship as this is proven, at least in

this instance, to effectively promote the achievement and success of Black male students at this Springpatch University.

Recommendations for Further Research

Before diving into further research suggestions for this document, I would be remiss if I did not address the elephant in the room, the current attacks on diversity, equity, inclusion, and higher education. While this research focuses on the experiences of Black male college students who attended a PWI, I feel that the lessons learned from TJ, Matt, Bob, Johnny and King's experiences can serve as the foundation to conversations that should be had on all campuses around how we recruit, support, retain and matriculate students from historically underserved populations. I believe there is value in ensuring that we function within the confines of these new policies and laws to support our students who show up and call our campuses home.

This study is crucial for understanding the unique challenges students from historically underserved populations face and informing and enhancing mentoring programs for scholars from historically underrepresented populations. Colleagues committed to this work can use the lived experiences of these participants to develop and execute effective strategies for fostering resilience, community, and success among students from historically underserved populations. In a climate where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and support for affinity groups face increasing scrutiny, this study can serve as a vital resource for those seeking to bolster their justification for efforts to create holistic spaces and foster belonging.

It became clear in this study that mentorship played a critical role in supporting the success and well-being of the participants who engaged in this study. The participants found that there was value added to their lives that would not have happened had they not participated in

this mentoring program, as the program provided them with the guidance, resources, and affirmation needed to thrive in a predominantly white institutional context and the environment that is created on said campus that isolates and others historically underserved students.

Future research should explore the impact of mentoring programs on other historically underserved student populations, not just Black males. In addition to other historically underserved populations, it may be beneficial to look at different institutional types, for example, HBCUs or HSIs, along with smaller or private institutions, as it would be interesting to see if there are any similarities and or differences among those groups. There could also be value in examining how this shows up for athletes, as athletics is a booming business on college campuses and embodiment of interest convergence.

With the change to policies like Name Image and Likeness (NIL), the transfer portal, and even additional changes around degree completion requirements for athletes, it would be interesting to see how their experiences are viewed through the lens of interest convergence. Ultimately, these populations are all unique in their ways, and the objective would be to gather data that would allow them to serve the students on their campuses better and more holistically.

Conversely, it was also clear that mentoring, regardless of the level – high school, middle school, or college – while different, has a positive impact on the participants of this study. There were shared differences between the experiences of the participants who had received mentoring before coming to college and those who had no experience with mentoring. While they all struggled, those with prior mentoring exposure struggled less. So, while this study focuses on the impact that mentoring has on these participants' lives while in college, it was necessary to report,

as it arose out of the data, that mentoring, even in high school, impacted the lives of these young men.

Lastly, future research should continue to explore how mentoring programs can address hegemony and imposter syndrome, promote academic success and well-being, and create more inclusive campus environments for historically underserved or underrepresented students who attend PWIs.

Conclusion

The research illustrated how the mentoring relationships these students prioritized, skill-building, goal-setting, and personal growth, undoubtedly led to these Black male students' retention and academic success. While this is true, it is also important to note that it should be the responsibility of a university or college to protect their Black male students rather than profit off them. Profiting off these students has been embedded in the culture of higher education and the change that should come with wanting to do better is slow and fleeting.

To be clear, research suggests that there is some improvement, as the overall "efforts to enhance the academic performances and educational experiences of Black males in college have exploded in the past 15 years, including institutional, state, system-level, and national programs, policies, and calls to action (Brooms, 2018, p. 18), but as was shared above, more has to be done. These students viewed their experiences through a multifaceted lens and highlighted the value derived from mentorship and mentoring for Black male college students. This was particularly true for these participants, especially if the mentors understood their experiences as Black males at a PWI.

These mentors and this program provided culturally relevant, personalized, and empowering mentorship. These mentors helped to facilitate an environment that cultivated personal growth, encouraged goal setting, and advocated for the holistic success of these participants. The mentoring program was perceived as a valuable resource that fostered a sense of community, resilience, and empowerment among the participants. The mentoring afforded to these students in this program even impacted those participants who had already been exposed to mentoring. So, mentoring worked especially as it pertained to the academic and personal support these students received on campus.

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA

He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother: Using Interest Convergence As A Framework to Examine
The Experiences of Black Male Students Who Participated in A Black Male Mentoring Program
at A Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest

IRBNet ID 2199028-1

Informed Consent Document

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to understand the experiences of
Black Male college students who participated in a Black Male Initiative/Mentoring program at a
predominantly White institution in the Midwest. This study is being conducted by Dameion
Doss, Sr., who is a doctoral student at the University of Southern Indiana in the Educational
Leadership program. Dameion Doss, Sr., will be under the supervision of Dr. D'Angelo Taylor
who serves as his chair. Dameion Doss, Sr., can be reached at ddoss@usi.edu, or 618-910-4489.
For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss complaints, or concerns
about a research study, or to obtain information or offer input, contact the University of Southern
Indiana Office of Sponsored Projects and Research Administration at (812) 465-7000 or
rcr@usi.edu. They are located at 8600 University Blvd., Wright Administration Bldg.,
Evansville, Indiana 47712. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form, and it
will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.
You can opt out of this study at any time if you feel the need to.

PURPOSE: This research study seeks to understand the experiences of Black Male college
students who participated in a Black Male Initiative/Mentoring program at a predominantly
White institution in the Midwest.

TIME COMMITMENT: If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in one
one-on-one interview that will last approximately 90 minutes, and one follow up conversation
that will last approximately 45 minutes with the investigator to go over the information that is
gathered to ensure accuracy.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: While the questions being asked are straight forward, there is the
potential risk that participants may feel uncomfortable because they are reflecting on their
experiences. The investigator will ensure that they are allowing time in between questions for
you to process and offer opportunities for you to take a break in between questions if needed.
Also, please remember that you can opt out of this study at any time, even during the interviews.
The benefits to participate in this study are many, the main one though is sharing your story in
the hopes that the information gathered can be documented and shared to help others who are
coming to your campus and joining the mentoring program after you.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Efforts will be made to keep your identity and personal information
confidential. This includes but is not limited to using a pseudonym instead of your real name and

ensuring that experiences that can tie back to you are done in a way that keeps your identity private.

COMPENSATION: There is no compensation offered for participating in this study.

VOLUNTEERING FOR THIS STUDY: This study is completely voluntary. Please remember that you can opt out of this study at any time, even during the interviews. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled to. Your decision whether to participate or not in this study will not affect your current or further relations with the investigator(s).

ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY: If at any time you decide to not participate in this study, the investigators would appreciate it if you would spread the word about this study to students who meet this demographic.

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT: I have read the information provided to be about this study. I have had all my questions answered. Based on the statements listed above, I give my consent to participate in this research study. I am 18 years of age or older and agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Name: _____Participant's Signature: _____Date: _____

Researcher's Name: _____Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocol
IRB Number: 2199028-1

Introduction

Hey, thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. I wanted to start off with a quick reminder that at any given time you can decide to stop this interview. Also, if you need a break or a minute or need clarity on a question, just stop me and ask. I have sent you a copy of your signed consent forms, the general document and the document allowing me to record this zoom meeting. I am asking for your permission again to hit record, on the zoom app, do I have your consent?

So, this interview will take approximately 90 minutes. The questions I will be asking you are all created so that I can understand your unique experiences while being a part of this program. As a reminder, my study will be focusing on the experiences of Black Males who participate/participated in a Black male initiative/mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), midwestern university. I am interested in understanding how the participants experienced their campus, as participants of a Black Male Initiative/Mentoring program through the lens of Interest Convergence. Interest Convergence is a theory that pretty much states that nothing that is done is done without a benefit to a group of people who have power and benefit from whatever that good deed is. Do you have any questions for me about the topic or anything else related to the study?

Before we dive into the questions though, I want to get some demographic questions out of the way to ensure that we are all on the same page, is that ok?

Background Data

1. How do you self-identify?
2. What year are you in college?
3. Is this your first college or did you transfer?
4. Do you currently or have you participated in the Black Male Mentoring program on campus?

Access To Higher Education and Understanding Their Why?

5. As you reflect on your journey to college, what made you decide to attend college?
6. As you think back on your decision to attend college, what were some of the things that helped you in that process to decide on this institution as your institution of choice?
7. Who helped you with navigating the process of seeking acceptance to/ applying to college?

8. Why do you think these individuals/ this person helped you in this way?
9. Of the things you shared as being instrumental in your decision to attend this institution, which of them made you the most excited about coming here?

Barriers to Higher Education

10. What does the term "first generation college student" mean to you? And do you identify as a first-generation college student?
11. What are some of the barriers you believe first generation college students experience when they start their journey into higher education?
12. Did you encounter any barriers during the process of applying to colleges, if yes, what were they? And if no, why do you think that is?
13. Who helped you to navigate the barriers you encountered during your process?
14. Why do you believe these individuals/this person helped you in this way?

Exposure to Mentoring

15. What role did your family, village, or support system play in you deciding on attending this institution?
16. What does the word "mentoring" mean to you?
17. Prior to attending your institution, have you ever been exposed to mentoring? If yes, what did that relationship look like, if no, what did you think mentoring was before coming here and joining this program?

College Mentoring Experience Through Interest Convergence

18. Can you share with me why you made the decision to join this program?
19. What do you believe are some of the benefits to participating in this program?
20. What do you think are some of the challenges to participating in this program?
21. How do you see this program shaping your college experience, or how has it shaped your college experience?
22. How do you believe the experiences you have had in this program will impact your life, or how have the experiences you gained from this program impacted your life?
23. Now that you have been in this program for over a semester, has your understanding of what mentoring is changed? If yes, what has been that change, if no, why do you think that is?
24. Who helped you to navigate the issues you have encountered during your time here on your campus?
25. Why do you believe these individuals/this person helped you in this way?
26. Have there been any barriers that you have seen come about that you felt were created because of how you present or identify?
27. How have you engaged with your campus and what has that engagement looked like?

28. What could your campus community do to better support you?
29. What do you believe your campus community could do to support students who share your demographic background?
30. How do you believe you add value to your campus?

Appendix C
AUDIO/VIDEO/PHOTOGRAPIC RECORDING OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Appendix C: Informed Consent Document Audio/Video/Photographic Recording of Human Subjects

IRB Number: 2199028-1

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA
He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother: Using Interest Convergence As A Framework to Examine The Experiences of Black Male Students Who Participated in A Black Male Mentoring Program at A Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest

{IRBNet ID Number}

Informed Consent Document

Audio/Video/Photographic Recording of Human Subjects

You previously agreed to participate in the study: **He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother: Using Interest Convergence as A Framework to Examine the Experiences of Black Male Students Who Participated in A Black Male Mentoring Program at A Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest.** As a reminder, this is a research study that seeks to understand the experiences of Black Male college students who participated in a Black Male Initiative/Mentoring program at a predominantly White institution in the Midwest. We are asking your permission to allow the investigator(s) to **audiotape [including sound], videotape [including pictures], or both audio and videotape**, and for the data collected using these approaches to be included in this study. You do not have to agree to be recorded to participate in the main part of the study.

The recordings will be used to assist the investigator(s) with analyzing the data collected and to potentially be used to assist with clarity if the data that is collected. The recordings will include your facial features, likeness and voice. The audio will not be shared widely and will be stored privately and used only for the purpose of analyzing the data provided by the participant. The recording will be stored electronically in a locked folder with no link to the participants or the study.

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or offer input, contact the University of Southern Indiana Office of Sponsored Projects and Research Administration at (812) 465-7000 or rcr@usi.edu. They are located at 8600 University Blvd., Wright Administration Bldg., Evansville, Indiana 47712. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form, and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep. You can opt out of this study at any time if you feel the need to.

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT: I give my consent to record and use the recording of the study. The investigator will not use the recordings for any other reason than that/those stated in the

consent form without your written permission. I am also confirming by signing this consent form that I am 18 years of age or older and agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Name: _____Participant's Signature: _____Date: ____

Researcher's Name: _____Researcher's Signature: _____Date: ____

Appendix D: Solicitation Email

Good day,
My name is Damieon Doss, Sr., and I am an Ed.D. candidate at the University of Southern Indiana (USI) in the Educational Leadership (Higher Education and Administrative Leadership track) program. I am reaching out because I am interested in speaking with students for my dissertation study who have participated in the Collegiate Men of Distinction mentoring program at your institution. I would like to speak with current and former students who self-identify as African American or Black and participated in this mentoring program.

I will be focusing on the experiences of Black males who participate/participated in a Black male Mentoring program at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), Midwestern university. I am interested in understanding how the participants experienced their campus, as participants of a Black Male Initiative/Mentoring program through the lens of Interest Convergence.

Participants will be asked to participate in one individual interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. After this interview is completed, I will then code and theme this data and present this data back to the individual participants for them to review for accuracy. This process of validating the data should take approximately 45 mins. Participants will not be compensated for participation in this study. All interviews will be conducted and recorded using Zoom.

Should you have questions about this research study, please do not hesitate to contact me. You may also contact my committee chair, Dr. D'Angelo Taylor, at 812-464-1757 or dtaylor@usi.edu. Additionally, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the University of Southern Indiana Office of Sponsored Projects and Research Administration at (812) 465-7000 or rcr@usi.edu. They are located at 8600 University Blvd., Wright Administration Bldg., Evansville, Indiana 47712.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at ddoss@usi.edu. Thank you for considering to participate in this study.

Kind Regards,

Dameion Doss, Sr.
Ed.D. Candidate
University of Southern Indiana
Educational Leadership and Higher Education