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Community College Retention Initiative: A Qualitative Study On The Lived Experiences Of Black Males Entrenched In A Mentoring Program At One Associate-Level College In The Southeastern Region

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE RETENTION INITIATIVE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALES ENTRENCHED IN A MENTORING PROGRAM AT ONE ASSOCIATE-LEVEL COLLEGE IN THE SOUTHEASTERN REGION

BY

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BY

BRANDON J. TURNLEY

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

2022

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, family, friends, church, and mentors.

Thank you all for believing in me even when I did not believe in myself. Your prayers,

reassurances, and uplifting pep talks got me through the roughest days of this journey.

To my wife, who is my everything, you prayed with me, cried with me, motivated me,

and kept me moving forward; this journey would be non-existent had you not walked

with me. To my parents, you instilled in me at a very young age that I can accomplish

anything if I put God first. I love you, and thank you for praying and rooting for me. To

my friends, you answered my calls and gave me the encouragement I needed when I

was down. To my church family, you prayed with me and for me when my spirit was

low. And lastly, my mentors, you believed in me more than I believed in myself; thank

you for pushing me and never allowing me to accept anything less than greatness.

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Thirdly, I would also like to acknowledge my cousin Veleria Elaine Shavers, who earned her heavenly wings on 12-06-2021. She has supported me throughout my educational journey, starting in undergrad. Without her generous contribution to my education and love for me, I am sure I would be unable to get to this point. You inspired me to finish to the very end. I hope I have made you proud. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the participants of this study. Thank you for being willing to share your story in hopes of inspiring others. It was a pleasure getting to know each of you and I pray you all will continue to reach the goals you have set.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the lived experiences of graduates of a Black Male Initiative (BMI) mentoring program at one associate-level college in the southeast region and the impact mentoring had on the participants' success at the college and its impact on obtaining their degree. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as the theoretical framework for this study. CRT acknowledges the centrality of race in every aspect of culture in the United States, including higher education. To guide this study, there were three research questions (1) How do graduates of the mentoring program view their success with the program? (2) What do students taking part in the mentoring program have to say about their experience at the college? (3) What do the mentoring program participants believe was the most beneficial aspect of the program?

The researcher interviewed five Black males to capture the participants' lived experiences. Each participant participated in three separate individual interviews and one focus group. Three themes emerged from the study: (a) Sense of Belonging, (b) Accountability, and (c) Positive Black Male Figure. The findings determined that the BMI mentoring program significantly impacted the participants' success and aided participants in graduating from the associate-level college.

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Chapter I. Introduction

I promise to give my very best to achieve my every goal; To be faithful and disciplined with everything in my control; Learning as much as I can for knowledge is the Key; There is nothing I cannot do, but the first steps starts with me; I represent my family even my community as a whole' And I refuse to let negativity keep me from my goal' I will exceed and excel if I just have faith and believe; I am a future Black Male Working, and there is no limit to what I can achieve; I will arise above all prejudice, and stay positive the whole way through, for I am a future Black Man working and you can be one too! (Black Male Working Academy, Inc., n.d., para.)

I recited this creed every Saturday morning starting in my sixth through 12th grade year. My mentor inspired me to live up to the expectations of the philosophy and never settle for anything less than greatness. I learned this as one of many lessons while being a part of a mentoring initiative. I owe much of my success to the teachings of the program. I valued the mentorship I received while participating in the program, and I want other Black males to go through a program that provides a mentor in hopes that they will benefit as much as I did. Although I had support from my parents, I did not have support in my classrooms. I did not connect with my teachers and felt like a number rather than an individual. Being part of the mentoring initiative, I was not a number, and they recognized my struggle and supported me through my educational journey. My mentors believed in me and pushed me to do better.

Black male retention initiatives remain a necessity in today's colleges and universities across the United States (Irvine, 2019). There are various, complex reasons for the need for mentoring programs. First-generation, low-income, single-parent households, and unprepared students are some reasons for the need for the programs (Brooms, 2018). Many first-generation students suffer while navigating through college. Parents of first-generation students are little to no help because they did not go to college themselves (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Fear of asking for help also plays a role in Black males graduating. Many do not have someone in their lives who have been to college to ask for help or guidance. According to Davis and Palmer (2010), Black males are more likely to be racially discriminated against in secondary education and unprepared for college-level work than other ethnic groups. As a result, Black males struggle with assignments, become frustrated, and give up. These examples explain why some Black males do not graduate from college. Questions abound in higher education institutions nationwide about increasing Black male graduation rates through targeted retention strategies.

I conducted a case study to gain insights to develop additional ideas and study questions to be explored in future studies. I examined and documented Black males' lived experiences in the Black Male Initiative (BMI) at one associate-level college in the southeast region.

<div align="center">Problem Statement</div>

Black males attend and graduate from college far less than other ethnic groups (Irvine, 2019). Tolliver and Miller (2018) highlighted that less than 33% of Black males

graduate within 6 years and perform far less academically than other ethnic groups. According to the United States Department of Education (n.d.), the national graduation rate for Black males is 33.5%, while their White male counterparts are estimated at 60.1%. According to Zell (2011), Black males remain highly underrepresented in higher education and are less likely to receive support. Zell suggested that this group often suffers from a lack of diversity commitments from colleges and universities and support systems like mentoring initiatives. LaVant et al. (1997) stated that when proper and well-organized systems that promote achievement in Black males are in place, they are truly set for success. Most colleges and universities recognize this issue and have established Black male mentoring initiatives to retain and increase the enrollment of Black male students. I examined Black male graduates who defied the odds and stereotypes. I provided an opportunity to allow them to share their story of the program and their motivation.

Significance

It is estimated that 70.5% of Black male students are enrolled in a community college instead of a 4-year university (Wood & Harrison, 2014). Although many Black males attend college, they face enormous challenges such as stereotypes from faculty, staff, and peers (Newman et al., 2015). Stereotypes can negatively impact individuals thinking they are not worthy or intelligent enough to perform academically well (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015). Watson et al. (2015) shared that many Black male students are regularly profiled and face many hardships during their educational

journey because of the lack of support from college faculty and staff. Therefore, a positive mentor and program are necessary for the Black male student.

Mentoring is an interpersonal relationship between a mentor and mentee that offers support (Wang, 2012). Mentoring can be formal or informal. Implementing mentoring programs has become a top priority at colleges across the United States (Crisp et al., 2017). Mentoring has gained national attention and has been a helpful resource for Black males to meet their needs to succeed in the classroom (Washington et al., 2017). In addition, mentoring has been identified as necessary for student's development as an individual and their academics (Crisp et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

BMI is one of the leading mentoring programs established for Black males who struggle to survive college at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The mentoring program aims to retain Black males through targeted programs designed to increase, encourage, and support inclusion and educational success. The BMI develops valuable leadership skills as a male empowerment program designed to address Black males' needs. In addition, this initiative fosters a supportive environment for students to learn and grow as active members of the academic community and as individuals through education.

Garcia et al. (2018) stated that the critical race theory (CRT) allows researchers to analyze and alter the educational realities of minority students and their communities. In addition, CRT is practical in exemplifying the complexity of race, gender, class, and social justice systems (Ladson-Billings, 2021). For instance, CRT

allows individuals to tell their stories about their experiences so that readers will have a personal connection to the events and circumstances. In this study, I examined Black males' perceptions of the associate-level college BMI mentoring support program. In this qualitative case study, I explored lived experiences of graduates of a BMI mentoring program at one associate-level college in the southeast region. Through interviews, I allowed research participants to share their experience of the program and how it influenced them to stay in college to continue their pursuit of a degree.

Research questions that guided this study were as follows:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do graduates of the mentoring program view their success with the program?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What do students taking part in mentoring program have to say about their experience at the college?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What do the graduates of the mentoring program believe were the qualities of the program that helped them obtain their education and succeed in their careers?

Theoretical Framework

CRT was used as the theoretical framework for this study. In the mid-1970s, CRT found its roots in the legal field through the work of Derrick Bell, who is considered the father of CRT (Ladson-Billings, 1998). However, scholars have used this theory on race and racism in education (Hartlep, 2009). Notable CRT scholars include Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cheryl Harris, Richard Delgado, Patricia Williams, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Tara Yosso. There are five tenants of CRT are: (a) the notion that racism is

ordinary and not aberrational; (b) the idea of an interest convergence; (c) the social

construction of race; (d) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (e) the

notion that Whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation (Hartlep, 2009).

Further explanation of these tenants will be provided in Chapter three.

CRT challenges cultures that behave and function in ways that benefit the

masses (Hall, 2017). These groups have the monetary gain to maintain a caste-like

system of insignificant individuals. Lucas (2018) stated that American schools have

overlooked their ability to support minority students (especially Black males). For over

two decades, CRT has successfully allowed voices of marginalized groups to be heard

on the inequities of the United States' educational system (Hartlep, 2009). Wendt

(2014) described CRT as a framework used to point out inequalities present in the

academic achievement of students of color. Researchers who use this approach grasp

a better understanding of students of color because it gives a perspective through the

lens of the individuals who are being studied. Senegal (2011), who used a similar

approach, wrote that CRT allows participants to share their experiences through the

programs. Therefore, CRT was ideal for this study. CRT was used to explore and

highlight the journey Black males' experience in the mentoring program.

Specifically, CRT can examine how racial profiling has shaped Black males'

experiences attending college. Smith et al. (2007) suggested that "research and

empirical data show that Black males are constantly confronted by a system that

oppresses them because they are members of a racialized group (African Americans)

and because they are Black men" (p. 563). Research also declares that these individuals undergo daily racial stereotypes established by White students.

Design and Methodology

This study was a qualitative case study. A case study approach allows for an in-depth investigation of a program, event, activity, or process for one or more individuals (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) suggested that a case study is bound by time and training, and researchers collect detailed information using various data collection procedures over a sustained period. In this case study, I identified the essence of human experiences described by participants (see Creswell, 2009). In this study, five graduates who identify as Black males of the BMI mentoring program were asked what most helped them while in the male initiative program. Through the lens of CRT, I was able to record the narratives of the graduates.

Research Ethics

Ethical issues that develop in qualitative research involve protecting participants' identities by not disclosing personal information. Confidentiality was a priority when conducting research, ensuring no private information was documented. Consent agreements were given out before the study began. Participants acknowledged involvement by signing the consent form and agreed to the nature of the study. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study if they wished.

Deficiencies with Past Literature

College administrators have struggled to retain students due to unprepared, uninterested college students (Fernando & Kenny, 2021). Retention also suffers when

students find jobs with a suitable income; as a result, school gets put on the bottom of the priority list. The Black male is no exception to this fact. The decline of Black male retention has caused many researchers to study the cause of this epidemic. Researchers such as Chan et al. (2015) have conducted mentoring programs to evaluate academic success and challenge Black males in college. According to Salinitri (2005), mentoring has shown a significant increase in academic performance and retention. The BMI initiative I studied differed from other programs because this school and population have yet to be explored. The program administrators allowed me to examine Black males' perceptions and experiences to understand better what encourages and challenges them to complete a degree. However, similar studies have been conducted on this topic. Many researchers have not contacted graduates asking what helped them while participating in male mentoring programs. The Southeast region has been known to have few faculty members and staff who represent the African American population. The literature review will provide a deeper understanding of four core functions that benefit the Black male.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap- The disparity in academic achievement for Black students compared to White students (Clark, 2014).

African American - An American of African descent.

Black male- A student of Black or African American descent.

BMI - A system-wide initiative designed to increase the number of African American males who complete their postsecondary education. Its mission is to provide

an integrated program model of academic and social tools that support students in adopting a positive mindset to complete classes successfully, elevate their cumulative grade point averages (GPAs), and matriculate through each educational level, and graduate.

Case study- An in-depth investigation by a researcher seeking to explore the real-life experiences of an individual or group through observations or interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Community college- An accredited institution that only awards individuals an associate in science or an associate in arts degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

CRT- A framework used to point out inequalities that are present in the academic achievement of minorities (Wendt, 2014)

First-generation- A student whose biological parents did not earn a college degree.

Marginalized group - Different groups of individuals within a given culture, context, and history are at risk of being subjected to multiple discrimination due to the interplay of different personal characteristics or grounds, such as sex, gender, age, ethnicity, religion or belief, health status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, education or income, or living in various geographic localities.

Mentoring- A process where a student and a faculty or staff have a relationship that gives guidance and direction.

Mentor- A person who gives support to an individual who needs guidance.

Mentee - A person who is advised, trained, or counseled by a mentor; individuals following the expert guidance of mentors through an established mentorship.

PWI - Institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater student enrollment.

Race – Category society places on physical characteristics (i.e., skin color, hair type, facial form, and eye shape). Though many believe that race is determined by biology, it is now widely accepted that this classification system was created for social and political reasons. As a result, there are more genetic and biological differences within the racial groups defined by society than between different groups.

Racism - A false belief in White supremacy that handicaps society, that upholds Whites as superior to all other groups, and the structural subordination of multiple racial and ethnic groups (Yosso et al., 2004, p.7).

Storytelling- A tenet of CRT that allows minority groups to replace narratives of the majority perspective with those that include the views and lived experiences of minority populations (Hartlep, 2009).

Student engagement- "An active commitment and purposeful effort expended by students towards all aspects of their learning, including both formal and informal activities" (Boulton et al., 2019, p.1).

Success- An accomplishment by Black males who successfully graduate from a 2-year PWI.

Chapter II. Research

Education leaders struggle to be culturally competent by not embracing and
creating inclusive environments (Hardin & Hardin, 2002). Lindsey et al. (2009) wrote
that individuals can be blind to other cultures that differ from their own due to
privilege and entitlement. Lindsey et al. (2009) described cultural proficiency as a
mindset accepting and valuing cultural differences. The road to cultural competency
begins with a commitment from education leaders who promote diversity and
inclusion for students, staff, and faculty. The world is changing and is filled with diverse
populations. According to Colby and Ortman (2015), the United States census
projected that between 2014 and 2060, there will be a 62 million increase in diverse
populations. Nevertheless, according to Dubbeld et al. (2019), most teachers struggle
in multicultural classes mainly due to training. Gause (2010) wrote that embracing
diversity will require individuals to look past differences by combining all parts of
cultures, values, and beliefs. This is important because it allows individuals to
understand who we are and the various forms of diversity.

Feingold (2019) noted that representing different races and ethnicities is
necessary for leadership roles. The educational process is vital for students to
understand the content in schools. Specifically, Black males need support and
guidance. According to Mohamad Karkouti (2016), to have social change, the practice
of diversity and inclusion must be implemented. More minority teachers and programs
and staying current with diversity and inclusion policies, which qualify as implemented
practices. According to Lindsey et al. (2009), to be culturally proficient is to be aware

that multiple views out in the world differ from our own. There are four barriers stifle

cultural proficiency including: (a) the researcher asserts systematic oppression, (b) the

presumption of entitlement, (c) unawareness of the need to adapt, and (d) resistance

to change (Lindsey et al., 2009). The barriers support the breakdown in the progress

toward cultural proficiency.

<center>Achievement Gaps and Opportunity Gaps</center>

In the late 1960s, many African American, Latino, and Native American

students still attended poorly funded segregated schools at rates lower than those

serving White students (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Ladson- Billings (2013) stated that

this was due to systemic inequalities. Kern (2020) suggests that an achievement gap

was formed due to these inequities. Kern (2020) added that the achievement gap

disparities stem from segregation during the Jim Crow era. Kern also added that

"Stereotypes, lack of access to education, factors outside-of-school, and Eurocentric

pedagogy all impact the initial achievement gap as well as contribute to its

continuation" (p. 28). According to Darling-Hammond (2013) the most apparent

inequities ranged from not having " expert teachers, personalized attention, high-

quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials, and plentiful information

resources (p.77).

In 1964, the United States passed the Civil Rights Act, which banned

discrimination in education based on race. However, opportunity disparities in the

United States continued to be an issue for Black students, specifically Black males

(Rowley & Wright, 2011). The achievement gap is often used to describe the disparities

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in academic performance of Black and Hispanic students, especially those in high-poverty areas, compared to their White counterparts (Carlock, Chaney, & Owen, 2022). Darling-Hammond (2013) highlights that the achievement gap stems "from the time that southern states made it illegal to teach an enslaved person to read, through Emancipation and Jim Crow, and well into the twentieth century, African Americans faced de facto and de jure exclusion from public schools, as did Native Americans and, frequently, Mexican Americans. (p.77).

According to Camera (2016):

> The achievement gap between White students and Black students has barely narrowed over the last 50 years, despite a near half-century of supposed progress in race relations and an increased emphasis on closing such academic discrepancies between groups of students. (p. 1)

In 2001, the United States attempted to resolve and close the achievement gap by implementing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; Rowley & Wright, 2011).

According to Rowley and Wright (2011):

> NCLB requires all schools to provide a quality education regardless of the child's demographics or ability level and, if these schools fail to achieve adequate yearly progress, parents are allowed to remove their children from that school and place them in a better school. (p. 93)

Although the NCLB had good intentions, it still did not meet the needs of Black students.

Clark (2014) defined the achievement gap as the disparity in academic achievement for Black students compared to White students. According to Koppie (2017), the achievement gap for Black males is significantly higher than for their White counterparts. Koppie also stated that Black males are not prepared to be in an educational setting, nor are they given a fair opportunity to receive an education due to inequalities. Ladson- Billing (2013) notes that this results from the opportunity gap, which stems from years of inequitable resources. These inequalities have their roots in the historical conflict between the dominant White American culture and the subdominant Black American culture (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2006; Basch, 2011; Cassidy & Stevenson, 2005; Ferguson, 2020; Fordham, 1996; Jenkins, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Noguera & Wing, 2008; Ogbu, 2004; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Portes, 2008; West, 1994, 2002; Whiting, 2006; Willie, 1994).

Hung et al. (2020) conducted a study to examine the factors that lead to the achievement gap between White and Black students. The study consisted of reviewing 2,868 schools across the United States. They concluded that economic inequality, racial inequality, and household educational attainment factored into the achievement gap disparities. Allen (2017) stated two factors are apparent in Black males' achievement gap, which are: (a) school resources and (b) socioeconomic status. According to Condron et al. (2013), Black male students from low socioeconomic backgrounds attend schools that lack proper resources such as books, qualified teachers to teach them, and support from the school. Hung et al. explained that this is due to segregated areas where Black students are sent to high-poverty schools with

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the least qualified personnel teaching. In contrast, White students are sent to non-poverty schools with well-qualified personnel.

Carter and Welner (2013) stated that the achievement gap is a term used frequently in education to describe the disparities in achievement levels between White and Black students because of their socioeconomic status. However, they explained that the achievement gap results from limited opportunities available to minorities with low socioeconomic classes, created by what is known as the opportunity gap. Carlock, Chaney, & Owen (2022) suggest that the term opportunity gap is more appropriate to describe the real issue in U.S education. Darling-Hammond (2013) defines the opportunity gap as "the cumulative differences in access to key educational resources that support learning at home and at school: expert teachers, personalized attention, high-quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials, and plentiful information sources" (p. 77).

Ladson-Billings (2013) agrees with refraining from using the term " achievement gap " and focusing more on the opportunity gap for achievement gap "suggests that something inherent in Black and Latino students, their families, communities, cultures, schools, and teachers is responsible for the disparities (p.13). Welner and Carter (2013) also agree and stated that the achievement gap proceeded from the opportunity gap. They continue to state that the opportunity gap limits individuals from reaching their full potential due to their inability to receive equitable opportunities. Ladson- Billings (2013) notes that the opportunity gap was apparent after the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Ladson-Billings

(2013) explains that Whites tried to keep segregation alive by not allowing their

children to attend desegregated schools or by sending them to private academies.

Hayward (2022) added that during the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board* decision, there

were approximately 82,000 Black teachers across the south. However, once the

decision was made, schools serving Black students were closed, causing many Black

teachers to lose jobs, resulting in a significant lack of representation in the classroom

for Black students. These tactics resulted in many Black and Hispanic students

attending predominantly minority schools that were less likely to have equitable

resources.

Welner and Carter (2013) conclude that although connected, the opportunity

gap differs significantly from the achievement gap. Welner and Carter (2013) add that

the opportunity gap focuses on the input rather than the output, meaning that, unlike

the achievement gap, it does not focus on what students are accomplishing but rather

on the root of how the issue began.

CRT

CRT refers to a historical and contemporary body of scholarship that aims to

interrogate the discourses, ideologies, and social structures that produce and maintain

conditions of racial injustice (Hatch, 2007). CRT provides tools to explore the realities

of racial inequality (Meghji, 2021). CRT seeks to analyze how race and racism are

foundational elements in historical and contemporary social structures and

experiences (Hatch, 2007).

In the 1970s, CRT found its emergence in research by legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freemen, and Richard Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) noted that Bell, Freeman, and Delgado noticed advancements of the Civil Rights Era were going in the wrong direction and wanted to emphasize racism in America. Ladson-Billings (1998) reported how the education system demonstrated that racism is "normal, not aberrant." The researcher indicated that while the education system was meant to be a public good, Ladson-Billings showed how through biased curricula, stigmatization from teachers, biased assessments, and unequal school funding, Black individuals face a significant deficit in the United States' education system. While many recast the resulting educational inequalities through cultural racism, arguing that Black individuals do not care about education, Ladson-Billings (1998) stressed the need for counter-storytelling to unearth the educational system's structural inequalities and reject myths of Black inferiority.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cheryl Harris, Richard Delgado, Patricia Williams, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Tara Yosso added the CRT research. According to Wendt (2014), CRT was first introduced into education in 1995 and used as a theoretical research framework. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) asserted, "Unlike some academic disciplines, CRT contains an activist dimension. It tries not only to understand our social situation but to change it, setting out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better" (p. 8). Essentially CRT emphasizes how individuals of color react to racism within the educational system (Yosso et al., 2004). There are five tenets of CRT, which include: (a) the notion that

racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (b) the idea of an interest convergence; (c) the

social construction of race; (d) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (e)

the notion that Whites have actually been recipients of civil rights legislation (Hartlep,

2009). Taylor (1998) concluded that tenets allow individuals to discuss how racism

impacts their lives. Taylor added that CRT will enable researchers to "engage and

contest negative stereotypes" through storytelling (p. 122).

CRT in Education

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT to education. In the article,

they argued for a critical race perspective in education on three propositions including:

(a) "race continues to be significant in the United States; (b) United States' society is

based on property rights rather than human rights; and (c) the intersection of race and

property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity" (p. 47). The idea

emerged because educational researchers had not fully theorized race in education.

Ladson-Billings and Tate believed that CRT could be an excellent framework for

examining educational issues involving racism or oppression. Since the introduction of

CRT in education, many scholars, Solorzano et al. (2000), Harper (2009), and McCoy

(2014), have conducted studies using CRT in education as a theoretical framework.

Examples of CRT studies in Education

Solorzano and Yosso (2000) conducted a CRT study that explored how

microaggressions affected African Americans' experiences at three "elite" PWIs (p. 65).

They used a case study approach and focus groups to collect their data. Using focus

groups allowed participants to voice how the microaggressions affected their

experiences. The study concluded that African Americans habitually felt isolated and frustrated with the campus racial climate. Further, participants' stories revealed that the microaggressions towards them caused self-doubt and that they could be successful in themselves.

Harper (2009) conducted a phenomenological study using CRT as a framework to oppose the negative narrative of Black males in higher education that they cannot succeed in higher education. To conduct this, Harper interviewed 143 undergraduate Black males at 30 PWIs. The findings revealed that Black males are consistently overlooked and considered inferior to their White counterparts. However, participants persisted in school and achieved academic achievement despite the negative stereotypes and consistent racism they experienced. The participants achieved this by standing their ground, being visible on campus, and confronting racist stereotypes.

McCoy (2014) conducted a study like Harper (2009), using CRT as well as using a phenomenological approach. McCoy's study explored to "understand first-generation students' of color transitional experiences from urban areas to an extreme PWI" (p. 155). McCoy defined the term extreme PWI as an institution with a majority White student population with minimal students of color. McCoy used the CRT tenet of counter-storytelling to understand the experiences of students of color who transitioned from a diverse community to an institution he phrased as a "sea of Whiteness" (p. 163). The findings revealed that participants who transitioned to a PWI encountered a "culture shock" and had to overcome challenges socially and culturally. McCoy's study highlighted the need for PWIs to create a welcoming environment and

programs such as a BMI to assist the needs of that population, so they do not feel

invisible.

Community Colleges

Cohen and Brawer (2003) defined a community college as an accredited

institution that only awards individuals an associate in science or an associate in arts

degree. So unlike 4-year institutions, community colleges cannot provide or award

bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degrees. Historically known as junior or 2-year

colleges, community colleges were a product of the Morrill Act of 1862 and 1890

(Drury, 2003). According to Drury (2003), the 1862 Act helped expand access to

individuals who were denied education, while the 1890 Act helped expand access to

minorities to obtain an education at land grant institutions. However, it was not until

1901 that the first community college was founded in Chicago, Illinois, with the help of

William Harper, the University of Chicago president at the time (Drury, 2003). Cohen

and Brawer (2003) noted that the rise and success of community colleges were due to

the demanding need for trained professionals in the workforce. According to Cohen

and Brawer, in 1930, over 450 community colleges were developed in the United

States. The growth and popularity of community colleges continued to grow over the

years, and all states by the 1990s had established community colleges. Cohen and

Brawer (2003) noted that in the 1990s, community colleges strategically recruited

minorities who had not previously had an opportunity to attend. They continued to

note that by 1991 community colleges enrolled 47% of minority students pursuing

higher education.

Over the past decade, community colleges have been highly sought out due to the flexible admissions requirement to enter the institution (Goldrick-Rab, 2007). Four-year institutions have strict test and GPA requirements and are outrageously expensive to most individuals. According to Hanson (n.d.), in the southeastern region, the average community college costs $4,230, while a 4-year college or university costs $10,680. Black males who cannot meet the requirements for 4-year institutions utilize the community college route for their education. Wood (2012) noted that community colleges have opened a door of opportunity for Black males to receive higher education.

Dougherty (1987) stated:

> Community colleges have become a central artery into higher education for working-class and minority students. Students in public two-year colleges are considerably more likely than students in four-year colleges to be nonwhite and to have parents who hold working-class jobs, make less than the median family income, and have not gone to college. (p. 86)

According to Clotfelter et al. (2013), community colleges are very diverse and offer various program options for students compared to 4-year institutions. Kasper (2003) supported this, stating that community colleges are more flexible, allowing students to obtain a certificate for a skill or a degree to advance to a 4-year institution at any point in their life.

Criticism of Community Colleges

Although community colleges are viewed as an alternative route due to the flexible admission process and tuition affordability, community colleges also receive much criticism. Community colleges are viewed by many as an easy route to allow the less able to obtain a degree at a bare minimum effort to obtain a job (Gauthier, 2020). This leads to fewer individuals pursuing a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution. Dougherty (1987) provided three issues of the community college route:

1. In the first 2 years of college, institutional factors produce a higher dropout rate among community-college entrants than among comparable 4-year-college entrants. The key institutional factors underlying this process are community colleges' low academic selectivity and lack of dormitories.

2. Among students who survive the first 2 years of college, community-college entrants encounter greater institutional obstacles to continuation into the upper division of 4-year colleges than comparable 4-year-college entrants. The key factors here are community colleges' strong vocational orientation, the distaste of 4-year colleges for the community-college transfers, the scarcity of financial aid for community-college transfers, and the simple fact that movement to the upper division requires movement to a new and unfamiliar school.

3. Among students who do enter the upper division of 4-year colleges, community-college entrants encounter greater institutional hindrances to continuation in the upper division of 4-year colleges than comparable 4-year-

college entrants. These factors include frequent loss of credits, difficulty securing financial aid, difficulty becoming socially integrated into the 4-year college, poorer preparation for upper-division work, and consequent difficulty becoming academically integrated into the four-year college. (p. 94)

Student Engagement

Student Engagement Defined

In education, student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education. Generally speaking, the concept of "student engagement" is predicated on the belief that learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise "disengaged." Stronger student engagement or improved student engagement are common instructional objectives expressed by educators. (Great Schools Partnership, 2016).

Student engagement has been recognized as essential for student success in higher education (Kahu, 2013). However, Kahu and Nelson (2018) pointed out that student success rates for underrepresented populations, specifically Black males are considerably lower than for White students. According to Olson and Peterson (2015), approximately 55% of students in the United States are engaged in school, 28% are disengaged, and 17% are actively disengaged. With this point, institutional leaders

must emphasize student engagement on their campuses for this population. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that because individual effort and involvement are the critical determinants of college impact, institutions should shape their academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement.

Boulton et al. (2019) defined student engagement as "active commitment and purposeful effort expended by students towards all aspects of their learning, including both formal and informal activities" (p. 1). Students who are engaged and committed have positive outcomes for their academic success. Student engagement has been a prominent topic in research for more than 70 years and continues to evolve (Kuh, 2009). Student engagement has established prominence in today's research from iterations of past research on the quality of effort and involvement. Notable pioneers who laid the foundation for the research now known as student engagement today include Tyler (1932), Pace (1984), & Astin (1985).

Tyler, a psychologist by trade, conducted research on student engagement in the early 1930s, focusing on how much time students spent on their work and how it affected their learning (Axelson & Flick, 2010). This student engagement theory was later known as time on task (Kuh, 2009). Tyler's research concluded that the time students spend on their studies would ultimately determine their success and understanding of the content. Pace added to that theory with research on the quality of effort, which led to developing of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (Kuh, 2009). Pace's (1984) theory on engagement concluded that if students intentionally studied and interacted with faculty, staff, and peers on substantive

content, they were more likely to succeed. After Pace researched the quality of effort, Astin (1985) popularized the concept with the theory on involvement. Astin (1984) wrote, "The theory of student involvement encourages educators to focus less on what they do and more on what the student does: how motivated the student is and how much time and energy the student devotes to the learning process" (p. 522). Although these scholars phrased the student engagement concept differently, the premise remained that students learn when engaged (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Kahu and Nelson (2018) supported this concept stating that student engagement is complex and multifaceted; an overarching 'meta-construct' aims to draw together diverse threads of research contributing to explanations of student success.

National Survey of Student Engagement (2011) stated that student engagement has two critical factors to benefit students. First is students' effort into purposeful activities and the time for their studies. The second is how school staff members utilize their resources to create opportunities and activities for students to be engaged. Brooms (2019) studied individuals' engagement experience, specifically Black males on campus, and shared why they believed it was meaningful. The findings showed that the Black males felt culturally connected and felt valued.

The Experience of Racism

Yosso et al. (2004) defined racism as "a false belief in White supremacy that handicaps society, (b) a system that upholds Whites as superior to all other groups, and (c) the structural subordination of multiple racial and ethnic group" (p. 7). The experience of racism for Black males is not new, as it has been an issue in American

society for this group for years (Carter, 2012). Harper (2012) stated that with racism

present, Black males are subjected to stereotypes and a lack of support from faculty or

staff. As a result, Harper noted that Black males tend to lose confidence in themselves

and academics. Steele (1997) agreed and stated that consistent stereotyping develops

a sense of inadequacy, preventing them from achieving academic success. Racism can

also harm Black males' mental health. Smith et al. (2007) conducted a study and

examined how the experience of racism affected 36 Black males' mental health while

attending a PWI. Their findings revealed that the Black males had a psychological

response of frustration, shock, avoidance or withdrawal, disbelief, anger,

aggressiveness, uncertainty or confusion, resentment, anxiety, helplessness,

hopelessness, and fear. Williams and Williams-Morris (2000) noted, "Racism in societal

institutions can lead to truncated socioeconomic mobility, differential access to

desirable resources, and poor living conditions" (p. 243). They also added that

"discrimination can induce physiological and psychological reactions that can lead to

adverse changes in mental health status" (p. 243). Utsey (1997) agreed with Williams

and Williams-Morris and added that the daily experience of racism is traumatizing,

which can alter one belief that one can succeed.

Lack of a Sense of Belonging

Hawkins-Jones and Reeves (2020) stated:

> Although it may appear that Black males do not value education due to
>
> mediocre academic scores, the truth is far more nuanced. The lack of culturally
>
> relevant learning experiences with culturally competent teachers, academic

disconnection, and stereotypical labeling account for their negative self-image and poor academic performance. Culturally relevant pedagogy reveals that students' educational experiences are often the factors that influence their academic achievement and self-regulation. (p. 40)

Masika and Jones (2016) stated that students feel more accepted, valued, and essential on campus when they have a sense of belonging. Brooms (2020) added that the development of students' belonging begins with the relationships students develop with faculty members or peers. According to Strayhorn and DeVita (2010), Black males are more likely than their White counterparts to be unengaged and socially dismissed on college campuses, resulting in a high dropout rate. According to O'Meara et al. (2017), a sense of belonging is the feeling of being connected, supported, valued, and respected by a significant group. Booker (2007) conducted a study that examined the relationship between school belonging and academic achievement. Findings revealed that the students felt belonging when the school's faculty and staff seemed to accept and support them. Ultimately this encouraged the students to strive for academic excellence. In addition, the students revealed encouragement from faculty and staff and appreciated school-related activities. This study highlights Brooms (2019) thought that establishing a welcoming environment is crucial to increasing academic performance and success.

First-Generation College Students

A first-generation college student can be defined as pursuing a postsecondary education when their parents did not (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Compared to non-

first-generation students, this population faces many barriers to achieving higher

education degrees (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). For example, Woosley and Shepler

(2011) stated that compared to non-first-generation students, first-generation college

students are more likely to drop out of school. In addition, 4.5 million first-generation

students who pursue a bachelor's degree, which is about 24% of the undergraduate

population, will have obstacles that will hinder obtaining a college degree (Engle &

Tinto, 2008). According to Petty (2014), many first-generation students are older,

married, attend school less than full-time, are employed, and are not active in campus

activities.

Tym et al. (2004) asserted:

> Students whose parents did not attend college are more likely than their non-
>
> first-generation counterparts to be less academically prepared for college, to
>
> have less knowledge of how to apply for college and for financial assistance,
>
> and to have more difficulty in acclimating themselves to college once they
>
> enroll. They are also more at risk for not completing a degree because they are
>
> more likely to delay enrollment after high school, to enroll in postsecondary
>
> education part-time, and work full-time while enrolled. Targeted intervention
>
> efforts that reach out to first-generation students both before and during
>
> college can help mitigate the differences between first-generation and non-
>
> first-generation students and can help colleges reach their goal of recruiting
>
> and retaining all students. (p. 1)

Petty (2014) studied the roles and steps institutions should enact to ensure that first-generation college students are successful. Petty concluded that institutions should provide various programs to help with their challenges. Compared to traditional students, many first-generation college students lack interest and motivation regarding education (Petty, 2014). This is apparent when looking at the rates of first-generation college graduates. Petty (2014) explained that first-generation college students juggle home life and higher education culture. Coming from a household without training or understanding of college functions is a heavy burden on a first-generation student. In addition, entering a new world of higher education alone without family support can have an extreme factor in failure. First-generation students do not possess that kind of capital to navigate collegiate spaces as freely as those who do (Petty, 2014).

Retention

Tinto's (1993) model identified three primary reasons for a student dropping out of school, which included: (a) academic difficulties, (b) the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and (c) their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. In addition, Tinto (1993) identified critical elements in the struggle to retain Black males. So often, these Black males struggle academically; they do not feel like they belong on campus or cannot conclude what they want to do.

Hall (2017) wrote that student retention at colleges and universities remains a top priority. However, many fail to retain significant proportions of students who

attend. Reasons for those who do not continue varies by student. Factors such as

social engagement, academic preparedness, and a sense of belonging are why many

do not continue their education. The African American male population is most

concerned about retention within postsecondary education (Hall, 2017). Compared to

Black females and other ethnic groups, Black males continues to see a decline in

retention and graduation. Although efforts have been made to recruit and retain males

of color, the fact of the matter is that many do not stay.

Males of color experience attending predominantly White campuses do not

have a sense of belonging on campus (Hall, 2017). Many Black males feel they do not

have a support system, and the campus is not inviting. The lack of diversity on campus

makes Black males feel inferior to the campus culture, which drives a want to leave

(Hall, 2017). This idea refers to one fitting in on campus. Too many Black males fitting

in is an area they could not accomplish. Creating an inclusive environment is crucial in

retaining males of color on campus. According to Brooks et al. (2013), Black males are

considered trouble and unfit for the vigor of college work. This stigma puts a target on

their backs, which many faculty can accept and not push the individual student.

Black males face much adversity on college campuses (Brooks et al., 2013).

Therefore, the need for retention programs that focuses directly on males of color is a

must. Retention programs of this nature create an environment that allows Black

males to discuss the issues they regularly face openly (Brooks et al., 2013). Brooks et

al. (2013) claimed that programs like these are viewed as a model that allows attrition

to decrease, ultimately increasing achievement.

BMIs

Brooms (2018) defined a BMI as a program that helps develop and nurture individuals by providing academic and social support. According to Brooms (2019), BMIs were created as an intervention measure for Black males to help retain and graduate them. Brooms (2020) stated that these programs speak to the needs of Black males and help establish a sense of belonging on campus. Black males are often stereotyped and harassed in PWIs, causing fear and a horrible college experience. Smith et al. (2016) conducted a study on the experiences of 36 Black males who attended a PWI. Smith et al. found that the Black males were psychologically drained from racism, causing Black males to feel frustrated, anxious, and fearful. The researchers also found that a predominantly White campus was more hostile toward Black males causing a distraction in their learning. The two emerging themes from the study were: "(a) anti-Black male stereotyping and marginality and (b) hyper surveillance and control directed at Black men by Whites" (Smith et al., 2016, p. 1).

The main factor in Black males not attaining success is the lack of preparation, disengagement, and access to necessary resources (Brooms, 2018). The researcher noted that Black males' success issues had gained enormous attention over the years (Brooms, 2018). As a result, efforts such as BMIs have been shared at many schools to close the achievement gap. Among the most successful retention programs include Black Man's Think Tank (University of Cincinnati), the Student African American Brotherhood (Georgia Southwestern University), the BMI (Texas Southern University), and the Meyerhoff Program (University of Maryland Baltimore County).

Kentucky BMI Programs

BMIs have been found to promote a sense of belonging, establish identity, develop leadership qualities, and academic success (Brooms, 2019). These programs build community and help establish relationships amongst students. Kentucky is one of many states with colleges and universities with BMI programs. For example, Eastern Kentucky University has a mentoring program called, Call Me Mister, a national initiative that brings together an individual who wants to pursue a career in education. The University of Louisville's BMI program provides participants with mentors and promotes academic excellence and leadership qualities. Western Kentucky University's program called Why Knot Us attempts to reduce the attrition rates of Black male students. It provides a positive support system for the Black male student while on campus. The University of Kentucky has a similar program, My Brothers' Keeper, which promotes connections with faculty and students. Many of these initiatives focus on graduation, retention, and persistence. Initiatives such as these benefit Black males because they give them a sense of identity. In addition, according to Brooms (2018), the initiative's atmosphere increases Black males' sense of belonging on campus.

Mentoring

Educating the Black male student has been a nationwide problem that involves social and economic issues. Colleges and universities struggle to retain and keep this population engaged. Many Black male students face many hardships and are regularly profiled as unteachable and unreachable (Brooms, 2018). The stigma of these stereotypes has hindered their success as educators push them to the side. The lack of

support is apparent, and Black males reap the benefit. The question is, what is the

solution? Implementing mentoring programs is a meaningful way to resolve the

problem.

Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) concluded that Black male students enjoy

academic-focused mentoring programs. Stromei (2000) suggested that a mentor

provides two functions for their mentee: (a) career-related and (b) psychosocial.

Stromei explained that career-related functions help the mentee with career

development and the psychosocial help with socialization and self-image. Mentorship

can have a lasting effect on an individual's life. There has been proven data from

research that mentoring is an indicator of student success. LaVant et al. (1997)

identified two types of mentoring styles, formal and informal. The formal mentoring

model is used more frequently because it is more effective in the research. Formal

mentoring provides a more intrusive aspect where the mentoring becomes more

personable and meaningful. According to Douglas (2017), many colleges have

established mentoring programs for African American males. Crisp (2010) notes that

with mentoring programs implemented in schools, the success and retention of Black

males are bound to improve.

DuBois and Karcher (2005) defined mentoring as a process where the mentor

gives life lessons and instruction to mentees in hopes of growth and development.

Mentoring provides an experienced individual in areas where the mentee hopes to

grow. The mentoring process can be within a school or work setting, but the impact is

the same. LaVant et al. (1997) claimed that the mentor also serves as a reality checker.

The mentor is significant in the mentee's life, and difficult conversations arise. The mentor must show the 'do's and the don'ts" in the area to pursue life.

Mentoring is a process that has many trials and tribulations. Some mentoring methods can be negative or positive in an individual's life. Gordon et al. (2009) defined mentoring as a positive relationship with a person who is not a parent to an adolescent. Gordon et al. (2009) continued to explain that to have a positive outcome of mentorship; the six functions should be implemented, including (a) emphasis on the relationship; (b) emphasis on the information exchange; (c) focus on facilitation; (d) focus on confrontation; (e) attention to their role as a model for the mentee; and (f) attention to the vision that the mentee brings to the relationship. Mentoring is viewed not just as what the mentor brings to the table, but the same is true for the mentee. To have an effective mentorship, both the mentee and mentor need to have cheerful mindsets and build trusting relationships.

PWIs can be a foreign place to Black male students (Sinanan, 2016). As the researcher stated, it is also tricky for Black males to navigate the complex nature of academic environment issues and challenges. Sinanan (2016) suggested that a bond between Black faculty mentoring and Black college students is a topic that needs to be addressed in an effort for colleges to recognize best practices for retention and student satisfaction.

Mentorship will provide a life-changing experience valuable to the mentee, providing them with helpful tools to get them through their academic journey (Douglas, 2017). In addition, the relationship between the mentor and the mentee

should be one that can grow over time. If practical, Hughes (2010) mentioned that

mentoring can result in a lifelong bond that is very special between the mentor and

the mentee. For Black males who do not have a positive figure in their lives in or out of

school, the mentor can quickly fill that void to ensure the student will be successful.

Chapter III. Methodology

Introduction

I explored the lived experiences of graduates of a mentoring program at one predominantly White community associate-level college attempting to retain Black males through a targeted program designed to increase, encourage, and support inclusion and educational success. I conducted a qualitative study using interviews and a focus group for five participants to achieve this. Through their voices, information was gathered that supported that mentoring of the program provided a pathway to their college success and graduation. This chapter will introduce the research methods, methodology, design, steps to conduct research, participants, and data collection.

Research Questions

I explored the lived experiences of graduates of a mentoring program at one predominantly White community associate level college. I used a case study approach to answer the following three questions to conduct this study.

RQ1: How do graduates of the mentoring program view their success with the program?

RQ2: What do students taking part in the mentoring program have to say about their experience at the college?

RQ3: What do the mentoring program participants believe was the most beneficial aspect of the program?

Methodology

Qualitative studies focus explicitly on the participants' lived experiences or stories to add to the body of existing research (Lichtman, 2013). Qualitative research collects, organizes, and interprets information gathered by observing and listening. He also provides ten critical elements of qualitative research (Lichtman, 2013). According to Lichtman (2013):

Qualitative research it involves description, understanding, and interpretation; it is dynamic; different methods may be employed in conducting qualitative research; it involves an inductive approach; it is holistic, viewing the situation in its entirety; data is typically gathered in natural settings; the researcher is instrumental in constructing an interpretation of reality; limited phenomena are studied in depth; reporting is characterized by thick description, often using the words of participants, and qualitative research frequently proceeds in a nonlinear fashion. (p. 28)

Qualitative research allows researchers to uncover and understand any phenomenon. Busetto et al. (2020) quoted Philipsen and Vernooij-Dassen's (2007) definition of qualitative research as "the study of the nature of phenomena," including "their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear or the perspectives from which they can be perceived," but excluding "their range, frequency, and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect." It also allows the researcher to obtain from first-hand observations, semi structured interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, participant observations, and recordings

made in a natural setting (Punch, 2013). Qualitative methods also facilitate the study of phenomenon research that is too complicated for quantitative to convey (Roberts, 2010). Some research questions cannot be answered using only quantitative methods. According to Busetto et al. (2020), research problems that can be approached particularly well using qualitative methods include assessing complex multicomponent interventions or systems (of change), addressing questions beyond "what works" towards "what works for whom when, how and why," and focusing on intervention improvement rather than accreditation.

The foundation of qualitative research is anthropology, sociology, and humanities principles (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative research has seen an increase in popularity over the years. According to Lichtman (2013), qualitative methodology seeks to answer the "why and how" (p. 37). Furthermore, Lichtman (2013) stated that qualitative research does not require participants to be in a controlled environment but a natural setting, enabling participants to tell their stories. This element of qualitative research raised my curiosity to capture participants' experiences, ensuring authenticity about the phenomenon being explored. I also found it interesting that I matched Lichtman's qualities to determine if qualitative methodology was the right choice. These qualities include interest in individuals and being empathetic toward them, interest in real individuals in a natural setting, and interest in thoughts, behaviors, and feelings (p. 35).

Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated that qualitative research explores and finds meaning in human and social issues for individuals and groups. Unlike quantitative

research, qualitative does not focus on numbers to explain the data. Instead,

qualitative tells the story of the participants and looks to understand by observing.

Lichtman (2013) defined qualitative research as how researchers collect, organize, and

interpret information gathered by observing and listening. Lichtman (2013) continued

by saying that qualitative research relies heavily on human interaction and verbal or

visual communication. The qualitative methodology examines humans in a natural

rather than an experimental environment. Qualitative research explores humans in

their natural settings to find meaning and understanding. To find this meaning, I

conducted a case study. Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) described a case study as

investigating a real-life phenomenon. Creswell and Creswell (2017) further explained

that case studies are in-depth analyses of individuals, cases, or events. To perform this

case study, I conducted a series of interviews and one focus group that addressed the

experiences of the young men who graduated from the program.

Case Study

A case study is defined as an in-depth investigation by a researcher seeking to

explore the real-life experiences of an individual or group through observations or

interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Case studies have a long history of being used

across many disciplines, including anthropology and sociology (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Case studies are formed when an identified case needs to be analyzed, whether an

individual, event, or community. For this study, the mentoring program focused on the

graduates telling their experiences. There are three variations of case studies

including: (a) instrumental, (b) collective, and (c) intrinsic (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Instrumental focuses on one issue or concern. Collective chooses multiple issues.

Intrinsic focuses on a unique or unusual situation of a program or individual. For this

study, I used an instrumental case study.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation was designed through the CRT lens. CRT was developed and

introduced in education in the early 1970s through the work done by Derrick Bell in

legal studies. Bell (1980) realized the advancements of the Civil Rights Era were going

in the wrong direction and wanted to emphasize racism in America. Since the

introduction to education, scholars Richard Delgado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cheryl

Harris, Richard Delgado, Patricia Williams, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Tara Yosso have

added to the body of research on CRT.

Crenshaw is among the notable pioneers of legal scholars of CRT who

highlighted the inequities for individuals of color (Taylor et al., 2009). CRT was

appropriate for this study because this theory suggests that race and racism are a

regular part of the culture (see Hartlep, 2009). CRT views racism as an ingrained part of

American society that privileges White individuals over those of color (Hiraldo, 2010).

With this notion, it is not easy to build a diverse and inclusive educational environment

for those of color. Critical race theorists assert that racism is integral to United States'

life, law, and culture. Therefore, any attempt to address and eradicate racial inequities

must be grounded in the socio-historical legacy of racism (Reynolds & Mayweather,

2017). As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are five tenants of CRT, which include: (a) the

notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (b) the idea of an interest

convergence; (c) the social construction of race; (d) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (e) the notion that Whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation (Hartlep, 2009).

The first tenet of CRT is the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational. In Chapter 2, racism was defined as a false belief that Whites are superior to all other groups (Yosso et al., 2004). This definition supports Milner's (2017) idea that racism is persistent and omnipresent in society and education. Milner also quoted the words of Bobo and Kluegel (1993) that because race and racism are deeply rooted in United States' society, they are also ingrained and deeply embedded in the policies, practices, procedures, and standardized education systems. In addition, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) concluded that racism "is the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most individuals of color in this country" (p. 7). According to Hartlep (2009), these views promote color-blindness and meritocracy. Hartlep stated:

> First, color-blindness legitimizes racism's need for an "other" in order to flourish and maintain its influence within the fabric of society. Racism and White supremacy are not aberrant, insofar as the oppressors—the status quo— exploit the "others" (the oppressed) in order to maintain their elitist control, as well as to claim that they are neutral. Close examination repudiates this false sense of neutrality. Second, meritocracy allows the empowered—the status quo—to feel "good" and have a clear conscience: many would ask why the powerful would not have a clear conscience since they maintain a majority of the wealth and power in society. The powerful maintain power and only

relinquish portions of it when they have nothing to lose; furthermore, they

receive platitudes and compliments when they do choose to dole out portions

of their power. (p. 7)

The second tenet is the idea of interest convergence. Interest convergence is

an "analytical construct that considers the motivating factors for laws and social

policies established to eradicate racial discrimination or provide remedies for racial

injustice on the basis of 'merit' and 'colour-blindness'"(Donnor, 2005, p. 57). Interest

convergence was theorized by Bell (1980), who is considered the father of CRT. Bell

believed that Whites would promote and support racial justice or progress if there

were something in return. Whites push for equality for minorities if there is a benefit

for them.

Ladson-Billings' (2021) illustrated an excellent example of interest convergence

by explaining that it occurred in 1988 when Arizona Governor Evan Mecham canceled

the state's Martin Luther King Jr's (MLK) holiday. As a result, the state lost over $25

million in revenue due to canceled conventions and sporting events. This loss made

the governor rescind this cancelation for the following year. Ladson-Billings (2021)

noted that the governor's action to allow MLK to be a holiday again was in the best

interest of the state economy rather than what the holiday represented. This example

clearly shows interest convergence when Whites benefit from pushing racial justice.

The third tenet is the social construction of race. Winant (2001) mentioned

"race has been a constitutive element, an organizational principle, a "praxis" and

structure that has constructed and reconstructed world society since the emergence of

modernity" (p. 19). This essentially means race has been a factor since the start of

society. Ladson-Billings (1999) mentioned that the social construction of race has been

damaging to individuals of color. Hartlep (2009) provided these examples of the social

construction of race in society:

> (a) The infamous *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case whereby the U.S. Supreme
>
> Court declared that "Negroes," whether free or enslaved, were not
>
> citizens; or (b) the infamous "one drop rule," a relic from the Jim Crow era
>
> where one drop of Black blood made an individual "Black."; and (c) how in
>
> 1935 minorities were denied Social Security and excluded from unions. (p.
>
> 9)

The fourth tenet is the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling. Storytelling

allows minority groups to replace narratives that only reflect the majority perspective

with those that include the views and lived experiences of minority populations.

Castelli and Castelli (2021) reported that this is called revisionist history, which

attempts to "unearth little-known chapters of racial struggles" that can validate the

current experiences of minorities and support the desire to change (p. 9). Storytelling

elevates the minority voices and works toward equity.

The fifth tenet is the notion that Whites have been recipients of civil rights

legislation. Hartlep (2009) asserted that Whites have undeniably been the primary

beneficiaries of civil rights legislation and affirmative action. Harris (1993) stated,

"Following the period of slavery and conquest, Whiteness became the basis of

racialized privilege — a type of status in which White racial identity provided the basis

for allocating societal benefits both private and public in character" (p. 1079). This privilege has undoubtedly transferred into education. Nathan (2021) mentioned that post-*Brown v. Board of Education*, students' school assignments have gone from mandatory to a preference for White students. In addition, Nathan noted that it is rare to see many White students at schools with a higher population of minorities.

As a framework, I specifically used counter-storytelling to evaluate the experiences of the five Black males that were interviewed. Howard (2008) confirmed that this is an appropriate approach by stating, "Counterstorytelling gives agency to African American males to offer narratives which can counter much of the rhetorical accounts of their identities that frequently describe them as culturally and socially deficit, uneducated, unmotivated, prone to violence, and anti-intellectual" (p. 975). I aimed to obtain the perceptions of the Black males regarding their experiences in the mentoring program while attending a PWI. CRT enabled the Black males to be heard.

Setting

This study's setting was an associate-level college located in the southeastern region. The college has seven campuses, three of which are considered main campuses, and four regional campuses offering associate degrees, diplomas, and certificates. The BMI program itself is only available on one campus. However, participants of the BMI program can be a part of the program regardless of the campus attended. The institution is considered the most affordable public college based on the per credit amount. In the fall of 2019, the institution reported an enrollment of 10,144. The institution is considered a PWI. According to Kentucky Postsecondary Education

Interactive Data Dashboard (n.d.), White students total 7,300, or 72 % at this

institution. Of the total enrollment, 508 were identified as Black males. (Kentucky

Postsecondary Education Interactive Data Dashboard, n.d.).

Participant Selection

I used a small, purposively sample of five participants. According to Orcher

(2017), purposive sampling is used when participants hold a valued characteristic and

will be a good source of information. Each participant for this study entered the

associate-level college and BMI the same year as a freshman. These participants also

graduated from the associate level college the same year. The ages of the participants

ranged from 21 to 24. Each participant received an email/ letter requesting

participation in this study. The letter contained the purpose of the study, how the

responses will be used in the study, and how their identities will be kept confidential.

After reviewing the letter, the participants signed a consent form to participate in the

study. Once signed, each participant returned the consent form to me. To hide the

participants' identities, I gave each participant pseudonyms. I documented students'

experiences at a specific location at this associate-level college. The participants'

experiences were communicated to me during their interviews and the focus group.

Participants

The five participants for this study were Kevin, Jamaal, Rodney, Jalen, and

Bryson. These names were assigned to each participant as pseudonyms to hide the

participants' identities. All five participants have transferred to a 4-year college since

graduating from the associate-level college. One of the five (Bryson) has already

graduated with a master's degree. In addition, each participant in this study was active in the BMI and other extracurricular programs.

Establishing Rapport

A good interviewer begins by building rapport and making a participant feel comfortable (Lichtman, 2013). I did not find it difficult to establish a rapport with the participants. These participants were very active in the BMI program, and I saw them frequently. I was not their assigned mentor in the program; however, I was their advisor in another program and suggested they join and stay active in the BMI. As their advisor in the other program, I made it my goal to create a safe and welcoming environment, not just with them but with all my advisees. As a result, my students, including the five participants, trusted and respected me as an individual. This relationship provided an increased opportunity for the data to be rich and authentic.

Researcher's Role

I was responsible for this study's data collection, analysis, and findings. As the researcher, I learned what drove these Black males to stay in the BMI program and what influenced them to graduate. In addition, these Black males shared all their lived experiences while at the associate level college. As Lichtman (2010) stated, the role of the researcher serves as a guide that collects data and makes meaning of what was discovered. This is important for a qualitative study because it explores real individuals' behavior, feelings, and traits in natural settings to find meaning in them.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted via Zoom by the request of the participants due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) virus. Consent forms were given to each participant willing to participate in the study before setting a date. There were five participants total for this study. Each participant had a separate interview with the researcher to tell their story. The interview questions were based on the research questions presented. Once individual interviews were conducted, a focus group between participants was conducted. The focus group explained how the group felt about the mentoring experience.

Data Collection

Qualitative research data can be collected through various methods such as observations, open-ended interviews, focus groups, or field notes (Roberts, 2010). In this study, I used a case study methodology and utilized interviews and a focus group interview for my source of data collection. Interviewing and capturing narratives of individuals has been a helpful method in qualitative research to capture and make sense of individuals' experiences (Seidman, 2019). The interviews gave the participants a platform to be heard and listened to and for me to understand the lived experiences of being a part of the BMI program and what aspects motivated them to graduate. The focus group allowed participants to collectively share experiences freely and allow others to respond to different experiences. After receiving the consent of the participants, I used a recorder to record the responses of each participant responses to the interview questions. I saved each recording and labeled them as Participant 1,

Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, and Participant 5 to hide the identity of each

participant. After each interview, I transcribed the responses of each participant. Once

transcribed, I identified themes from all the responses.

The design I chose to guide the interviewing process followed Seidman's (2019)

in-depth interview model. Seidman's (2019) model instructs researchers to interview

participants on three separate occasions. According to Seidman (2019), the first

interview establishes the context of the participant's experience. The interviewer asks

them to tell as much as possible about themselves, considering the topic up to the

present time. The second interview allows participants to reconstruct the details of

their experience within the context in which it occurred.

The interviewee asks the participant to concentrate on the concrete details of

the participant's present lived experience in the topic area of the study. The third

interview encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds

for them. According to Seidman (2019), the question of "meaning" is not satisfaction

or reward, although such issues may play a part in the participants' thinking. Instead, it

addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work

and life. Having three interviews helps build a relationship between the interviewer

and interviewee and avoids what Seidman (2019) called contextual ice. That is, each

interview forms the setting for the next and helps to clarify meaning. If the process is

not followed, the participant will only focus on their experience while participating and

being a university student. The interview process took 3 weeks to complete. Upon

approval from Eastern Kentucky University Institutional Review Board (IRB),

participants selected to participate in the study received consent forms. The beginning

of the storytelling by the participant served as the participant's consent to participate

in the study. Once documents were completed, interviews were over a period of three

weeks. The interviews took place at the participant's discretion and lasted 30–50

minutes. I used a tape recorder with the interviewee's permission and transcribed the

interviews later.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the

data (i.e., text data as in transcripts or image data as in photographs) for analysis; then

reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes;

and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell & Poth,

2018). I followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral as my data analysis

process for this study. The steps in the data analysis spiral include managing and

organizing the data, reading and memoing emergent ideas, describing and classifying

codes into themes, developing and accessing interpretations, and representing and

visualizing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, interviews and a focus group were

conducted. There were three individual interviews for each participant, which aligned

with Seidman's (2019) interviewing model, followed by a focus group interview with all

participants. After the interviews, I collected and organized my data as the analysis

spiral suggests. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and placed in a binder for

each participant. Next, I followed the memoing emergent ideas by thoroughly reading

the transcribed interviews to immerse myself in the data and make sense of the

interviews (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, I began the coding method by identifying

themes from the data. The coding process is central to qualitative research and

involves making sense of the text collected from interviews, observations, and

documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, I interpreted, represented, and concluded

what I learned in the last two steps. The findings of the data are shared in Chapter 4.

Positionality Statement

It is imperative for a researcher to disclose positionality when conducting

qualitative research. I am African American male whose educational environment has

been predominantly White. I had teachers who did not believe in me until I joined a

BMI. I believe that had it not been for my BMI and my mentors, I would not have been

as successful as I am today. Since graduating high school, I have been an avid

supporter of BMIs, hoping more Black males will join and benefit from them. Starting

my career in higher education, I have placed myself as a facilitator in many BMIs. In

this study, I was careful not to influence the participants by my beliefs.

Summary

In this qualitative case study, I explored lived experiences of graduates of a BMI

mentoring program at one associate-level college in the southeastern region. I

explained the research design and described how the data would be collected for this

qualitative study. I collected data from the five participants selected for the study

through interviews and a focus group. Each interview was recorded and transcribed to

ensure the accuracy of the participant's responses. This approach was ideal for this

study because it allowed me to hear participants' lived experiences in the program. To

protect the identity of the selected participants, pseudonyms were given to each

participant. All recorded material was secure and saved on my personal laptop. In

Chapter 4, the findings will be shared.

Chapter IV: Results

In this qualitative case study, I aimed to explore and provide context to the lived experiences of graduates of a mentoring program who attended a predominantly White associate-level college. To achieve this, I used a series of individual interviews with five participants who identified as Black males to achieve this study, followed by a focus group. Each participant was a member of the STRONG (pseudonym) BMI mentoring program at PREP Community College (Pseudonym). In this chapter, I will present the findings and introduce the five participants. In addition, their perspectives on the mentoring program will be highlighted through the transcript interviews.

Data Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 3, I choose to follow Seidman's (2019) in-depth interviewing model. This model instructs researchers to conduct three separate interviews, focusing on a different facet of the research study. Seidman (2019) stated that the first interview serves as an introduction to getting to know the participant, the second interview focuses on the participant's lived experiences, and the third focuses on the meaning of the experience allowing the participants to reflect. I implemented these guidelines to answer my three research questions:

RQ1: How do graduates of the mentoring program view their success with the program?

RQ2: What do students taking part in the mentoring program have to say about their experience at the college?

RQ3: What do the mentoring program participants believe was the most beneficial aspect of the program?

Procedures

As discussed in Chapter Three, the participants for this study were Black males who graduated from a predominantly White associate-level college and were a part of a mentoring program. After receiving approval from the IRB, an invitation to participate in a study email (see Appendix B) and a consent form (see Appendix A) were sent to six prospective research participants. Five of the six prospective research participants responded by accepting the invitation and sending back a signed consent form. The sixth respondent expressed interest in the study but informed me that he could not participate because he had yet to graduate from his associate-level college. To participate in the study as outlined in the consent form, the participant must have been a graduate of an associate-level college, identity as a Black male, and have participated in a BMI mentoring program. The five eligible respondents were invited to participate in the study and were scheduled for three individual interviews and one focus group. Each interview and the focus group were recorded and later transcribed. The time for each interview varied between 30–50 minutes. The focus group interview lasted less than 15 minutes. Due to COVID-19, all participants were given the option to meet in person or virtually via Zoom. Each participant decided to meet virtually.

Participants

The descriptions provide a brief background of each participant based on the information gathered through the interviews. To ensure confidentiality for the

respondents, I used pseudonyms rather than their legal names. I also incorporated

security measures by securing data on a password-protected USB drive. The

pseudonyms given to the five participants were Bryson, Jalen, Kevin, Jamaal, and

Rodney.

Bryson

Bryson was a 23-year-old Black male who worked in human resources. Bryson

has three siblings and is the oldest of three. Bryson enjoys exercising at the gym and

spending time with his friends. He still lives with his parents to save money to buy a

home. During his K-12 years, he mentioned that he went to all predominantly White

schools. Bryson recalls sometimes being five out of 20 Black faces in a classroom. After

graduating from high school, Bryson wanted to go straight to a 4-year college, but due

to the cost, he decided to start at PREP Community College. While attending PREP,

Bryson joined STRONG Black Male Initiative, TRIO Student Support Services (SSS), and

became a student ambassador. He considered himself a good student who

consistently received good grades. After graduating from his associate-level college,

Bryson received a bachelor's in business administration at a Historically Black College

or University (HBCU). While attending his HBCU, he joined a fraternity and many other

school clubs.

Jalen

Jalen was a 21-year old Black male who was a paraeducator at the local school

district. He grew up in a single-family home and was raised by his mother. Jalen enjoys

hanging out with friends and organizing events. Up until his fifth-grade year, Jalen

went to predominantly White schools. Starting his sixth-grade year, Jalen was accepted into an all-male preparatory school that was predominantly Black. After graduating high school, Jalen decided to attend PREP Community College due to its affordability. While at PREP, he joined STRONG and TRIO SSS program. After graduating from his associate-level college, Jalen pursued his bachelor's in elementary education at a HBCU. Jalen wants his master's degree but is contemplating which degree he wants. Jalen is currently looking for a full-time role as an elementary teacher.

Kevin

Kevin was a 23-year old Black male who was an after-school counselor. Kevin has one sibling, and he is the youngest. Kevin considers himself a laid-back reserved individual who enjoys hanging out with his friends and traveling across the county. Kevin attended PREP Community College due to his high school GPA and not receiving scholarships to 4-year institutions. While discussing his K-12 years, Kevin considered himself a "mischievous kid" who would get in trouble for doing "stupid things." Kevin mentioned that he did not take school seriously, which he now regrets. However, while at PREP Community College, he mentioned he decided to "get it together" and focus hard on his education. Kevin joined STRONG BMI and TRIO SSS. Kevin mentioned that while at PREP, he joined the local 4-year college marching band through a special between schools. After graduating from PREP, Kevin pursued a degree in kinesiology at the local 4-year institution. Kevin stated that he loves working with kids and plans on being a physical education teacher.

Jamaal

Jamaal was a 23- year old Black male who worked at Amazon. He is an only

child and currently lives with his grandmother. During his K-12 years, he mentioned

that he went to all predominantly White schools. Jamaal considers himself a quiet and

laid back person. Jamaal mentioned that he played sports throughout his K-12 years,

which kept him out of trouble. Jamaal mentioned that he decided to attend PREP

Community College because it "was something to do." Jamaal mentioned that had he

not gone to PREP Community College, his grandmother would have made him get a

full-time job. While at PREP Community College, Jamaal joined STRONG and TRIO SSS.

He became a peer mentor and a tutor. After graduating from PREP Community

College, he pursued his bachelor's in family sciences at a local university.

Rodney

Rodney was a 21-year old Black male who worked as an operations manager at

a sports complex. In his free time, Rodney likes to volunteer in the community by

mentoring others as his mentors did for him. Rodney hopes to be a general manager

for a sports team day. Rodney has no siblings and was raised by his mother and father.

According to Rodney, he and his father did not have a great relationship. Like Jalen,

Rodney attended an all-male preparatory school starting his sixth-grade year that was

predominantly Black. Rodney mentioned that he decided to attend PREP Community

College due to the affordability. While at PREP Community College, he became an

active member of SRONG and joined the TRIO SSS program. After graduating from

PREP Community College, he continued his education at a 4-year university to receive his bachelor's degree in communications.

<div align="center">Perceptions of Mentoring</div>

DuBois and Karcher (2005) defined mentoring as a process where the mentor gives life lessons and instruction to mentees in hopes of growth and development. LaVant et al. (1997) claimed that the mentor also serves as a reality checker. LaVant et al. explained that the mentor has a significant presence in the mentee's life. They showed the 'do's and the don'ts" around pursuing life. During interview two, I asked each participant what mentoring meant to them. Sentiments such as "guide," "authentic," and "advice-giver" were among the words given to describe the term. Their definitions (see Table 1) support current literature and provide perspective on how Black males perceive mentoring.

Table 1. Participants' Definitions

Research participant	Perception of mentoring quote
Kevin	Mentors help and give good advice. They give experiences they went through and want me to learn from their experiences, so I don't do what they did. Or I could do what they did if it went well for them
Jamaal	Mentor is someone who gives you wisdom and puts you on game about life. Whether that being, like I say, school, working, relationships, etc. They just make sure you stay on track, don't fall off your course in life. It could be a father figure or a big brother.
Bryson	Mentoring means being there, being present. As a mentor, you have to have my best interests at heart. A mentor is when somebody tells me I'm wrong. Mentorship is very authentic; it's not

	forced to; it's natural. Once you do something natural, you do it with your all.
Rodney	Mentoring. I think of empowerment. I think guidance. I think of aspiration, giving them the fire to do something, and motivation.
Jalen	A mentor is someone who is there to help you, lead you, and guide you when things get rough when things are great. They're your first contact person. They're going to have your back more than anybody. They're going to be that person you can go to ask about, "Okay, do I apply for this job or this job?" And they're going to be that person that you talk about, "Okay, I'm having this issue in a class. What do I need to do?" Or if you're having life issues, it's like, okay, this is the person I can go to, and I know that they're going to have my back and give me the best advice, best whatever that they can give me.

Why Community College?

Before diving into the themes, I thought it would be essential to hear why the participants recommended other Black males to attend community colleges. Kevin, Jamaal, Bryson, and Jalen participated in the focus group. Rodney, however, was unable able to join. As discussed in Chapter 2, community colleges have increased opportunities for Black males to receive higher education (Wood, 2012). Dougherty (1987) supported this by stating, "community colleges have become a central artery into higher education for working-class and minority students" (p. 86). Kasper (2003) added that community colleges are more flexible, cost-efficient, and allow students to obtain a certificate for a skill or a degree to advance to a four-year institution at any

point in their life. During the focus group session, the participants were asked if they would recommend other Black males to attend an associate-level college before attending a 4-year college. The participants agreed they should attend an associate-level college first, highlighting that it would be in their best interest. Table 2 shows their statements about community colleges.

Table 2. Statements About Community Colleges

Research participant	Recommending community colleges quote
Kevin	I think it's a good thing to do because if you don't feel confident about college out of high school, you can get a feel for college in a smaller setting, just to see if you'd make it or not, honestly.
Jamaal	I would definitely say you should go just because I feel like it's more community based and you build relationships with people older and younger people, and I think that's good.
Bryson	I would say I also encourage community college because it's small classes. And also, as Jamaal said, it's like a community. It's small. And it's cheaper than a four-year college.
Jalen	Have to agree with the cheap, especially if you are not a good test taker. Your ACT scores to get those scholarships at the big colleges or the four-year institutions aren't getting you those scholarships. So, go ahead and start at that small level, where the classes are cheaper.

Emergent Themes

In this case study, five Black males who graduated from PREP Community College (pseudonym) who participated in the STRONG (pseudonym) BMI were

interviewed for this case study. As mentioned above, three individual interviews and

one focus group served as the data source for this study. The interview and focus

group questions (see Appendix C) were purposively asked to answer my three research

questions. Three major themes emerged from the interview data. The themes were:

(a) A Sense of Belonging, (b) Accountability, and (c) Positive Black Male Figure. These

themes emerged from the transcription of the research participants lived experiences.

I found these themes following Creswell and Poth (2018) data analysis spiral, as

mentioned in Chapter 3.

Theme 1: Sense of Belonging

The responses from the research participants suggest that their experience in

the BMI program fostered a sense of belonging on campus. All the research

participants appreciated an environment that promoted Black males such as

themselves. Three of the 5 participants stated that most of their educational

experiences have been predominantly White with no programs that reflected them.

The other two participants stated that their educational environment has been

predominantly Black, so their transition to PREP Community College was a shock until

they joined the BMI program.

Kevin stated,

> My elementary school was all White, pretty much. Middle school was all White.
>
> I feel it was good to see other people, successful people of my color. I feel it
>
> was good to be with a group of them and hear their experiences their stories. I

feel it's different from the people that you can relate to. I can relate to it

better.

Rodney, whose educational background has been predominantly Black, stated that he

had to adjust to attending PREP Community College because it is predominantly

White. Rodney mentioned that he was accustomed to teachers and faculty looking like

him. In his first interview, he explained that he went to a Black male preparatory

school. Rodney stated,

I went to a Black preparatory school starting my seventh-grade year to my

senior of high school. Everything was taught through the African American lens.

They teach you how to be a man, and they teach you how to be a man of color.

Once Rodney learned about the BMI program, his comfort level and adjustment to

PREP were much smoother. Rodney stated, "Just seeing people like me and having

that support was good. It also created like a small little brotherhood. Brotherhood is

always good because there's just people holding each other accountable. It was great

that we were doing it."

Jalen, who also went to a majority-Black school, stated he had a tough adjustment

attending STRONG until he joined the BMI program. Jalen stated,

It was hard because growing up at an all-Black school, people in the class

looked like me, and the teachers looked like me. When I got to STRONG, it was

completely different. You want to see other Black males and Black females also

achieving.

Bryson, who has gone to all White schools where they never offered BMI programs,

expressed his gratitude that STRONG had the BMI program available. Bryson stated,

> I loved it because it was just a space where brothers like Black men and me
>
> could just get comfortable and talk about what we faced daily." So, to see a
>
> Black man that has made it so far into where he is right now was just really
>
> encouraging. And the program is really great. We get so much information all
>
> the time, and we used to go out details for dinner too. I will really encourage all
>
> Black men to get that program when they go to college because it gives you
>
> that sense of belonging, that you're not alone. You have somebody with you.
>
> You have a brother who's going through something that you're going through,
>
> or somebody went through what you're going through.

Jamaal mentioned that it was hard to communicate with his White counterparts on

campus, often making him feel like an outsider. He recalled a project he had to do with

a group of all-White participants. Jamaal stated,

> I had to do a group project in my family science class. It was weird trying to
>
> communicate with them. I'm not trying to fit in, but I know myself, and I guess
>
> you could say the culture played a part, and the communication is different.

However, when Jamaal joined the BMI, he shared similar thoughts as Bryson. Jamaal

stated,

> It felt like community-based. It felt like it was a family. I felt like I was cared
>
> about if that makes sense. Being around a bunch of Black males, I felt, would

help me along the way because we all can relate in some sense and hold each

other down.

Prior to joining the program, many of the participants did not enjoy the

experience of being on a predominantly White campus. They felt ignored,

unmotivated, and alone. The BMI program reassured them that they truly belonged on

campus. It provided a safe environment where they could be comfortable in their skin.

Jalen and Rodney mentioned that the support they received from the program

prompted them to want to return the favor and mentor others to avoid feeling the

same. Jalen stated, "[The BMI program] helped me start enjoying school more, and

helped me realize I want to do the same and be able to give back to students." Rodney

stated, "I want to help those other Black males out, to keep them on track."

Theme 2: Accountability

All participants voiced how much they appreciated their mentors for holding

them accountable and how it significantly impacted their academic success. According

to the participants, they did not do their best in school at times, which resulted in bad

grades and missing assignments. However, after joining the BMI and having their

mentors, they appreciated their constant reminders to do their work even if their

message was not polite.

Kevin stated,

He [his mentor] didn't sugarcoat. He was real about it, and he pushed me. He

got on me a few times, but I needed it. I needed somebody to discipline me,

stay on my back, and make sure I did all my work. And that person was the best

thing that happened to me in my college career. He got my head straight.

Rodney shared similarly and stated,

He kept me on my toes, checked on my grades and stuff like I was in high

school. He would make me pull up my grades or look them up himself because

he could do that. He had consent, of course.

Rodney also mentioned that he considered dropping out of college, but his mentor

would not allow it. Rodney stated,

I was like; I think I'm going to drop you out. I didn't do good. I don't think I can

do this." [His mentor] looked him in the eyes and was like; you are a candidate

for greatness; you are not dropping out. I kind of sat there, and he just

reminded me of all the hurdles and mountains that I climbed. And he told me

that this isn't my stopping point. He was like, your stopping point is after you

walk across the stage with your bachelor's. And then he was like, oh, excuse

me. I mean, your master's. And then he did it again, excuse me, your doctor's.

Most of the participants confessed that they did not always go to class. Reasons

included that they were tired or did not want to attend class. Bryson stated, "He would

check on me every day. He would check on me how my classes were going, and check

if I'm going to class." Bryson stated, "[His mentor] really pushed me to just do better.

Bryson stated, "[His mentor] gave me tools that I needed." Bryson mentioned that he

still resonates with a lesson he mentored shared with him. Bryson stated,

[His Mentor] made me reflect that there is no time to mess up. As a Black

man, you have options: go to college, do whatever you want to do, six feet, or

go to jail. As a Black man, that just kept in my head. And I'm like, I don't want

to be six feet. I don't want to go to jail. So, the only way to success is for me to

go to school, get this degree, and get a job. So that really pushed me.

Jalen shared a similar story as Rodney about how his mentor held him accountable.

Jalen stated,

[His mentor] had access to my grades because there were times that a bad

grade would come in, and he would just randomly check on me like, Hey, how

are you doing? How's this class going? And it's like, Ooh, did you see that grade

that I just got? And he wasn't afraid to sit down with me and make me do the

work. There were many times that I was sitting in the back of his office doing

work just to get it done.

Jamaal stated that he would have been "an average student" without his

mentor's extra push. Jamaal praised his mentor for always keeping him accountable

and pushing him to complete his work, especially with math. Jamaal stated, "I'm not

good at math, and I was always struggling, but thanks to God for him. [His mentor] got

me through it and made me sit with people who knew math." Jamaal mentioned that

his professors never pushed him that hard and believed that they did not care for him

and thought they only wanted him to "get in and get out" of their class.

Theme 3: Positive Black Male Figure

The research participants collectively concluded that their mentors were more than just other adults in their life. Instead, the participants considered their mentor a brother, influencer, friend, or father. They expressed that they looked up to them and observed how they carried themselves, hoping they could mirror them later in life. For example, Jamaal stated, "just watching [His Mentor] shaped me into being a professional. He carried himself well, and I tried to act the same." Their mentors shared their life stories, reassuring them they could make it in life just as they did. Participants also mentioned how accessible the mentors were and how easy it was to communicate with them about academic, personal, or social issues. The participants expressed that they were positive Black male figures in their life that they aspired to be.

Kevin stated,

> [His Mentor] was like a big brother. We talk and tell stories. He told me about his experiences in college, something I could relate to. Told me stuff I should do, shouldn't do, what I should take, how I should go about things. He just gave me good advice.

Bryson and Jalen both considered their mentors as father figures. Bryson mentioned in his first interview that he and his father did not get along because his father was "a negative person" when he mentioned his goals. Bryson stated, "I am not close to my dad like that; my mentor was more of a father figure. He shaped me into who I am today. So, we're really close." Bryson even mentioned that his mentor was the closet

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positive "Black male figure" in his life. Jalen shared similar sentiments as Bryson. Although Jalen knows and has a relationship with his father, he does not look to him for guidance. Jalen stated, "me and my dad never were close. My mentor was the closest thing to a Black male figure helping me in this lifestyle."

Rodney stated,

I could call him anytime, and he would drop everything to help him in his time of need. It was a strong relationship, almost like a friendship, like a best friend type of thing. Like I call, he would come running.

Each participant was asked about the most memorable and beneficial components of being involved in the BMI program, and the participants spoke highly of their mentors. Jamaal stated,

[His Mentor] gave me preparations for obstacles. I feel like you're going to grow up more and just go through more stuff. It doesn't have to be anything crazy, just adulting. He taught me how to adult better, if that makes sense.

Jalen stated, "Being able to have that person that I can ask a question. If [His Mentor] didn't know the answer, he would go to his connections and get the answer." Bryson stated, "I would say just him being there, him advising me on what to do, benefited me because that's what I am today. He pushed me to my full potential." Rodney stated, "The fact that I can just call if I have a problem."

Kevin stated,

I think the most beneficial thing from that mentorship from him and me is he made me realize what I could do if I took school seriously, the jobs out there,

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the opportunities out there, people I could meet. He made me realize that if I
wanted to be successful in life, I got to put the work in school, focus, do my
work, and study. He put that in my brain every day we talked.

Whether they considered their mentor a brother, father, or a friend, the
support from the mentors has proven to be significant in their success. The research
participants gained valuable lessons from their mentors, no matter how they
presented the teachable moments—their words of wisdom and presence in their lives
helped them view success as tangible and achievable.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provides the findings of this case study that resulted from the lived
experiences of five Black male graduates at one associate-level college in the
southeastern region who participated in a BMI. The chapter included an introduction
of the participants, interview findings, data analysis, and emerging themes. Three
individual interviews and one focus group were later transcribed and coded to identify
data themes. See Table 3.

Table 3. Themes

Theme	Name
1	Sense of belonging
2	Accountability
3	Positive Black male figure

These three themes allowed me to construct descriptions from the research
participants' lived experiences. As a result, the data tells the story that the mentoring
program had a lasting impact on the participants' success at college and success after

graduating. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the results and the implications

of the study findings. Finally, Chapter 5 will discuss limitations, literature gaps, and

future research recommendations.

Chapter V: Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

I aimed to explore lived experiences of graduates of a BMI mentoring program at one associate-level college in the southeastern region. The study's purpose was to examine the impact mentoring had on the participant's success at the colleges and its impact on obtaining their degree. A case study design was utilized to collect data from the participants on their thoughts on how the mentoring program impacted them. To collect the lived experiences, five males who identified as Black agreed to participate in the study. Each participant had three induvial interviews and participated in one focus group. Through this interviewing process, the participants shared their experiences. The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: How do graduates of the mentoring program view their success with the program?

RQ2: What do students taking part in the mentoring program have to say about their experience at the college?

RQ3: What do the mentoring program participants believe was the most beneficial aspect of the program?

As discussed in Chapter 1, the CRT was used as the theoretical framework. According to Morgan (2013), "The use of CRT can help identify structural and institutional racism in education and how they contribute to injustice and inequity for Students of Color" (p. 205). Yosso and Solórzano (2005) supported this claim stating that CRT "challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses" (p. 74). The central tenet used to interpret the data for this

study was storytelling and counter-storytelling. Storytelling and counter-storytelling are great tenants that allows researchers to recount the lived experiences of an underrepresented group (Morgan, 2013). Three themes emerged in this study that aligned with the central tenet of the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational, and—the CRT tenet of storytelling and counter-storytelling values the knowledge of people of color.

Theme 1 revealed that the participants felt invisible on campus before joining the BMI. They expressed that they could not relate to others on campus. Two participants revealed that they were accustomed to seeing individuals who looked like them before attending college, which gave them a sense of belonging. However, after attending PREP Community College, they were in a "culture shock," for they were not used to being the minority. The other three participants noted that their educational backgrounds have always been predominantly White and expressed sentiments like, "I am used to it," I didn't have to adapt much," or " no different than my middle school or high school." This CRT example highlights the tenet that racism is ordinary and not aberrational. Popular opinions around race would suggest that race is not a factor. However, the participants' statements support the CRT in that race is natural. After joining the BMI, they all expressed that the BMI community brought them joy, allowing them to be comfortable on a predominantly White campus. Many participants noted that the program allowed them to build a community that eventually became a brotherhood. Jackson and Hui (2017) mentioned that Black males join predominantly Black groups because they give them a sense of security and support. This allowed

them to have a positive social life on campus. Students feel more accepted, valued, and essential on campus when they have a sense of belonging (Masika & Jones, 2016). The program also allowed them to discuss their problems and frustrations as a Black male who can relate.

Themes two and three aligned well with the CRT tenet of storytelling by giving the participants an opportunity to share their lived experiences as Black males who attended an associate-level college while participating in a BMI. Howard (2008) stated, "Counterstorytelling gives agency to African American males to offer narratives which can counter much of the rhetorical accounts of their identities that frequently describe them as culturally and socially deficit, uneducated, unmotivated, prone to violence, and anti-intellectual" (p. 975). Theme two revealed the importance of having a great support system on campus.

The participants expressed there were times they did not put school as a top priority, which resulted in them getting bad grades or giving thought to dropping out of college. However, they enjoyed their mentors for the pep talk, the tough conversations, and the authenticity of how much their mentors cared about their success. For example, one participant enjoyed it when their mentor sat them down and talked to them as if they were his parent, telling them to get their stuff together. Another participant enjoyed that their mentor made them do their work in their office and would not let them leave until it was finished. Interestingly, participants seem to like direct directions and believe that contributes to their success.

Theme 3 highlighted the positive effects of having a positive Black male figure

as a mentor. The participants looked up to their mentors and aspired to reach their

level of success. For example, Jamaal stated, "just watching [His Mentor] shaped me

into being a professional. He carried himself well, and I tried to act the same."

According to the participants, having a person who looked like them mentoring gave

them an extra push to want to succeed. The participants revealed that until they

joined the BMI program, they did not have many people to look up to. The BMI

program provided mentors; later, they described them as fathers, brothers, or friends.

The Importance of Mentoring

The research participants expressed how the mentoring program positively

impacted their feeling of being welcomed on a predominantly White campus. Along

with providing the Black males a mentor, the program provided the participants with a

community of Black males to whom they could relate. Bonner and Bailey (2006)

explained that for Black males who attend PWIs, their peers help promote a sense of

belonging in an environment that differs significantly from their cultural background.

The participants explained that they would have monthly sessions that brought all the

participants together to fellowship and hear words of wisdom from Black

empowerment speakers. Masika and Jones (2016) stated that students feel more

accepted, valued, and essential on campus when they have a sense of belonging. The

research participants described this community as a "brotherhood." Jamaal noted, "It's

good to have people who got the same path as you or the mindset, at least, to be

something rather than nothing." Bryson stated, "It was just a space where brothers

like me could just get comfortable and talk about what we faced in our daily to day life." Jalen stated, "There was people I had never seen before on my campus that I saw at other campuses. And once we all came together, it was like, oh, there's a lot of us. There's more of us." Kevin revealed, "I feel it was good to see other people, successful people of my color. I feel it was good to be with a group of them and hear their experiences, their stories." Rodney stated, "It blew my mind. Just felt like home. So, I was like, yeah, this is it. This is what I need, and it kept me going, so it was great."

The research participants expressed that they appreciated their mentors holding them accountable. The research participants had some rough times during the college journey, but their mentors would not let them be mediocre in school and would correct them if they did. For example, Kevin stated, "I needed somebody to discipline me, stay on my back, make sure I did all my work. That person was the best thing that happened to me in my college career."

Bryson discussed how he liked his mentor following up with his teachers about his grades when he was not doing well. Bryson also appreciated how his mentor went to his classes to ensure he was there. Bryson stated, "He would check on me how my classes is, check my grades, check I'm going to class."

Jamaal shared his experience with going through math at college. Jamaal was not necessarily great at math and would not get the proper help. However, his mentor guided and ensured he got the help he needed to pass the course. Jamaal stated,

In college, I definitely struggled, but thanks to God for him. He got me through

it with that class and stuff like that. And I got to sit with people who knew

math, just peer-wise or mentor-wise, which helped me graduate because math

is not my thing. He pushed me.

Limitations

Qualitative research data collection was used for this study. Qualitative data

collection methods include observations, open-ended interviews, focus groups, or field

notes (Roberts, 2010). However, there were a few limitations of this study. The first

limitation was the population of the participants. The population researched was

restricted to Black males. Several other marginalized groups, such as Latino, Asians,

Middle Eastern, or Pacific Islanders, could have been included. Opening the pool to

include other populations may have provided a different perspective on mentoring.

The second limitation was that this research study was conducted using a qualitative

approach. Qualitative research allows researchers to collect data from participants;

however, by doing this researcher relies on participants to give complete, accurate,

and honest answers. This means that the findings are based solely on participants'

perceptions and the ability to give accurate meaning to those perceptions. As a novice

qualitative researcher, administrator, mentor, and individual who identifies as a Black

male, I had to set aside any biases or preconceived notions of the topic to capture

their voices and experiences without adding my own accurately.

Research Implications and Recommendations

The study's findings determined that the BMI mentoring program significantly impacted the participants' success at the associate-level college. This study supports LaVant et al.'s (1997) theory on mentoring being an effective instrument for Black males to overcome barriers to achieving academic success. Through the CRT lens utilizing storytelling, Jalen, Kevin, Jamaal, Rodney, and Bryson's counternarratives help overshadow the master narrative that Black males are trouble and unfit for the vigor of college work (Brooks et al., 2013). Although they may have had trouble with certain subjects or doubts that they could not succeed, they were able to lean on their mentor for guidance and support. A recommendation for associate-level colleges is to create more focused programs around Black males. Crisp (2010) noted that specialized programs focusing on Black males' needs aid their social and cultural development. Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) noted that for this to happen, institutions' leaders need to support the cause by funding the program and not just relying on volunteers.

The study findings also determined that Black males enjoy a supportive environment that brings together individuals like them. This environment developed a sense of belonging on campus. Brooms (2019) agreed and stated that establishing a welcoming environment is crucial to increasing academic performance and success, especially for Black males. Booker (2007) had a similar finding in his study. Booker's study revealed that Black males felt a sense of belonging on campus, which increased academic performance. The participants explained that they would have monthly sessions that brought all the participants together to fellowship and hear words of

wisdom from Black empowerment speakers. They expressed that seeing so many individuals look like them in a room was uplifting. They described the community as "a family" or a "brotherhood." A recommendation for associate-level colleges is to create more environments on campus that are conducive to the needs of Black males. As supported by the literature, Black males join and seek spaces or groups tailored to their needs to feel more secure (Brooms, 2019).

Future Research Recommendations

My hope for the future is that studies such as this one continues to be replicated. The study shows that educational attainment is attainable for Black males when implementing proper initiatives. Continued research will allow more authentic voices of Black males to be heard, allowing others to add to the body of research. A suggestion for future research is to increase the sample size. In this study, I focused on five Black male graduates who participated in a BMI who graduated from one associate-level college. A recommendation to expand and conduct the study at multiple associate-level colleges. This would add to the valuable lived experiences of the Black males. Another recommendation is to conduct a study that follows Black males' experiences from the start of their college journey until they graduate. This arrangement may offer an in-depth analysis of their experiences as they progress from freshman year to their sophomore year. Lastly, I did not focus on other minority groups such as Latino, Asians, Middle Eastern, or Pacific Islanders. Evolving the study to include these groups may be beneficial and worth examining.

Conclusion

I discussed the findings, the emergent themes, recommendations, and future research opportunities. The study findings revealed BMI mentoring program significantly impacted the participants' success at the associate-level college, which led them to graduate.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form

Appendix A: Consent Form

You are being invited to participate in a research study on graduates who participated in a Black Male Initiative program at an associate level. This study is being conducted by Brandon Turnley, a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky University.

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in three individual interviews and one focus group interview that will be recorded so I can transcribe later. All interviews will take place at an agreed location of your choice. I will use your answers as part of my study. I would like to keep this information in my files for three years, and after that time, I will destroy the information. Your participation is expected to take no more than 30 to 45 minutes long for each interview.

This study is anonymous. You will not be asked to provide your name or other identifying information as part of the study. No one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the results of the study, we will write about this combined information.

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

This study has been reviewed and approved for exemption by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University as research protocol number 4553. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Brandon Turnley. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, please contact the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University by calling 859-622-3636.

By completing the activity that begins April 4, 2022, you agree that you (1) are at least 18 years of age; (2) have read and understand the information above; and (3) voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Thank you so much for thinking about doing this. If you would like to participate in this study, please sign your name below.

Sincerely,

Brandon Turnley
Doctoral Candidate, Eastern Kentucky University

YES, I _____ (Print First and last Name) would like to participate in this study.

Participants Signature: _____Date: _____

Appendix B: Email Invitation

Appendix B: Email Invitation

Dear Invitee,

My name is Brandon Turnley. I am a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky University in the Educational Leadership program. I am kindly requesting your participation in my doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: Community College Retention Initiative: A Qualitative Study on the Lived Experiences Of Black Males Entrenched in a Mentoring Program at One Associate-Level College in the Southeastern Region. I am interested in hearing the voices of graduates who went through a Black Male Initiative. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is completely anonymous, therefore, it does not require you to provide your name or any other identifying information.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent form attached. Once you have reviewed the consent form and are willing to participate in the study. Please sign and date the consent form and send it back to me.

Thank you so much for thinking about doing this.

Sincerely,
Brandon Turnley
Doctoral Candidate, Eastern Kentucky University

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Appendix C: Interview Questions

INTERVIEW ONE: PERSONAL INFORMATION AND PAST EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

1.   Tell me a little about yourself and where you are from.

   - What are some of your hobbies?

   - What are some things you like to do?

2.   Think back to your K-12 years.

   - Tell me about a memorable event that was good.

   - Tell me about a memorable event that was not so good.

   - How did each event make you feel? What did you learn from them?

3.   What type of student were you in school?

   - Did you get into much trouble?

   - Were you a quiet student?

4.   Did you like school?

   - What made it enjoyable

   - What made it not enjoyable

   - What improvements would you want to be implemented if you had to go

     through K-12 again?

5.   Did you feel like you had a good support system within the school?

   - Did you feel like you could talk to someone who cared if you had an issue?

6.   Think about some of the teachers you had.

   - Was there a particular teacher you liked? Why?

   - Was there a particular teacher you disliked? Why?

7.   Going through K-12, what did you aspire to be?

- Why did you want to be this?

- What motivated you to keep this aspiration?

- At any point, did you change it?

INTERVIEW TWO: PRESENT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

1.   Tell me about your college experience

- Why did you choose this school?

- Did you like your experience? If not, why? If so, what made it a great

  experience?

- How did you feel being a Black male on a predominantly White campus?

2.   What was your primary reason for attending college?

3.   At any point during your college journey, did you ever consider dropping out?

- If so, what influenced you to stay?

4.   How did you become involved with mentoring at your college?

- Why did you join the program?

- Did you like being a part of the mentoring program? If so, what made it

  enjoyable? If no, why not?

- Would you recommend incoming first-year students to join the program? If so,

  why? If not, why?

5.   In your own words, what does mentoring mean to you?

- Do you believe the mentoring you received in the program helped you succeed

  in school? Why or why not?

6.   Think back about the mentor you had with the program.

- How long did this person mentor you?

- What type of relationship did you have with the mentor?

- What was most beneficial to you about the relationship?

- What impact, if applicable, did mentoring have on your completion of the degree?

7.   In your own words. How would you describe success?

- Do you think being a part of the mentoring program helped guide you to the success that you have now?

INTERVIEW THREE: FUTURE TRAJECTORIES

1.   What is next for you since you graduated? What are you doing now?

2.   What are your career aspirations?

3.   Do you believe your mentors prepared you for your next steps?

4.   Do you still keep in contact with your mentor since graduating? If so, how has that been going?

- Is the mentorship still beneficial to you?

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

1.   Think about your experience at your college. Would you recommend others to go there? If so, why? If not, why?

2.   Do you think you would have been as successful had you not joined the mentoring program?

3.   What advantages do you believe you had as a member of the mentoring

program?

4.   What would you say was your favorite part of the mentoring program?

- Was it only mentoring, or did the program do other activities?

5.   As a Black male who has graduated college. What advice would you give to the

incoming Black males entering college?