Lifting as we climb: A counter-storytelling narrative and phenomenological analysis of successful undergraduate Black men navigating socialization and support

by

Quincy A. Bevely

B.A., Northern Illinois University, 2010
M.S.Ed., Northern Illinois University, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Department of Counseling and Student Development
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Abstract

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis is to explore the lived experiences and stories of three undergraduate Black men in their junior and senior years at a predominantly White higher education institution in the northeast. This qualitative study was conducted with a purposeful sampling technique. The criteria used were as follows: (a) identify as Black, (b) identify as a male, (c) be an upperclassman (i.e., junior or senior) at a predominantly White institution, and (d) experience life as an undergraduate at the college for 2–3 years (no transfers). Interpretive phenomenological analysis along with autoethnographic counter-storytelling narratives were woven together to explore, describe, interpret, and situate how the participants and the researcher make sense of their lived experiences navigating socialization and support at a predominantly White institution.

Grounded in the theoretical framework of institutional betrayal theory nested with critical race theory, this study aims to expose the barriers that undergraduate Black men experience navigating socialization and support through counter-storytelling narratives provided by the participants and researcher. To better understand this phenomenon and address the research questions, data was collected via three focus group interviews over the course of 6 weeks, and paired with years' of personal journaling from the author. The three participants and researcher contributed collectively in every phase of the research design. From the data analysis process, two superordinate themes and six subthemes emerged; three subthemes for each superordinate theme were identified. The two superordinate themes identified were *lack of access for Black men* and *a hostile campus environment for Black men*. These two superordinate themes aligned with the extant literature on critical race theory and institutional betrayal theory.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Doris Wright Carroll

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Imagine booking your dream vacation to your favorite destination, only to learn there is no access to your flight, signs to guide you, or personnel to support your journey as a tourist. Travel agents were unwilling to assist you; concierge services ignore you; and then, the roads are uncharted with dangerous paths endured at each wrong turn. Undoubtedly, your trip becomes lonelier, more frightening, and unaccommodating with every second experienced on this treacherous voyage. What was once a dream vacation later becomes a terrifying nightmare for you, right? You feel bewildered. Surely, there is no way this could possibly be the lifelong experience you dreamt of and longed for, right? You quickly discover what was certainly a dream has transformed into a series of doubtful regrets.

Unmistakably, college was my dream vacation. And being the first to successfully attend and graduate college in my family was my unique tourist experience as an undergraduate student, which involved overcoming many obstacles along the journey. I believed Northern Illinois University (NIU) was my dream destination and booking this experience was the best thing I could do to take flight, and invite success into my future. I felt NIU was far enough from the Southside of Chicago (my birthplace) and Finley Place Apartments (my childhood home) to punch my ticket out the hood. Although Chicago and Finley Place Apartments nurtured me from a boy to a man and brought me many joys throughout life, I desired a journey to a safer environment free of gangs, drugs, and crime. I knew my potential, what was inside me, even if institutions of education and media were pushing against that personal vision. I simply wanted a more prosperous outlook for my family's future in my adult years. I was certain NIU was the means to the result of greater opportunity, better memories, and a smoother lifelong ride.

You see, to me, college was the key to achieving the *American dream* and was supposed to be about experiencing the *best 4 years of my life*. I mean, wasn't that the experience college recruiters promised me? Isn't that the message media portrays in the news? Don't we see the *American dream* in movies, and our favorite television sitcoms? Seriously, think about the shows where they graduate high school and go to college like *Saved by the Bell* and *Boy Meets World,* don't the characters get a taste of the *American dream* and *the best 4 years of their life*? Perhaps it's a little different for Black men, like myself, huh? We're not typically characterized accurately or as the stars of these types of shows. Go figure. Full transparency – our stories are absolutely not portrayed by the White stars in the dominant narrative of most coming-of-age stories.

Well, since there are few shows depicting our experience, allow me to tell you a counter narrative about the undergraduate experience of Black men. This experience is a phenomenon rarely told by college recruiters or your media channels. Please don't misunderstand me, I had some of the best experiences outside the classroom with people who look like me and share a similar background in college, which I'm sure is the same for many other Black undergraduate men. However, academically and culturally, my college journey was immensely lonely, frightening, and unaccommodating due to the absence of diversity, inclusion, and what might best be described as betrayal by college personnel.

The limited guidance from my family as a first-generation college student along with the complex road as a Black undergraduate man to my final destination – graduation—created a struggle to find support and co-curricular opportunities. With every mistake or wrong turn potentially being the end of my journey, and undoubtable return to the hood, it was a high-stakes experience. The pressure for me to succeed and graduate was unmatched when compared to my

more privileged and White peers. I carried that pressure, daily. I shed far too many tears in my road to graduation; but I conquered all the watershed moments through God, my boys in college, and ultimately, the resiliency to be more than a statistic. Each tear later became a testimony of triumph in my story that I can now share with readers like you.

Aside from earning a Bachelors and Masters, one of the things I am most appreciative of is that my self-doubt transformed into self-discovery with every barrier of access and support overcome. My self-discovery was most apparent through deep reflection and the opportunity to reread my journal entries in college. This process has proved to me that yesterday's tears water today's harvest: as I am now earning a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.).

While in college and as a professional, I have been extremely reflective and disciplined in journaling about my experiences as a Black man at a PWI. I like to say, I am *journeying while journaling*. This helps me to make sense of my lived experiences. Embedded in my journals are personal narratives of vulnerability, courageousness, success, failure, and, of course, the boldness to accomplish what no one in my family had done before me – graduate college. I am a firm believer that it is my moral and righteous responsibility to *lift other brothers as I climb*. I will weave in excerpts from my journal in the text of this study as a means of uplifting my brothers, code switching to speak to the culture, and immersing myself in the research as the fourth participant of this study. My journal excerpts will serve as a counter narrative of trekking through institutional betrayal and the many nuances of being a Black undergraduate man at a PWI. To be clear, I lived within this reality for Black men. I am one of these Black men. I share many of the same stories as these Black men.

Despite counter narratives of undergraduate Black men often going unnoticed or overlooked by colleges, institutions are well-aware that a college degree is a launching pad for

future success. The benefits of earning a bachelor's degree statistically include longer life, better health, and an increased likelihood of employment (Abel et al., 2014). However, the experiences of Black students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) do not offer the same opportunities for success. As an individual's race, socioeconomic status, and academic success are undoubtedly interconnected (Jackson et al., 2013), it provides advantages to those who are White, wealthy, and privileged. Education does have the potential to provide an array of opportunities for equality among racial groups in relation to socioeconomic status and lifelong success (Bennett & Lutz, 2009). Yet, in postsecondary education, racial and ethnic differences pose many challenges for various populations and subgroups, especially Black men at PWIs (Harper, 2014b; Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Druery and Brooms (2019) established that integration on college campuses holds a different meaning for traditionally marginalized groups, such as Black men, than it does for groups that are dominant among college students. Harper (2012a) has demonstrated that there remains a discrepancy in the number of Black men who attend and graduate from college compared to their White counterparts. Black men are at a higher risk of being academically dismissed or dropping out of college compared to White students and students from other ethnic groups (Cuyjet, 2006; Tate & Bagguley, 2017).

According to Rodgers and Summers (2008), PWIs have not been as effective as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in retaining and conferring degrees upon Black college students. To endure, particularly at PWIs, Black men may need to attenuate their identity, experience isolation, matriculate without mentorship, and take taxing measures to integrate into college culture (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Graduation rates for Black men at PWIs have been a topic of concern for researchers, faculty, and student affairs practitioners since the 1960s (Allen, 1988). Presently, attrition and lower graduation rates of Black men are a vexing problem for colleges and universities nationwide (Seidman, 2018). At 4-year institutions, Black men have a completion rate of 40%, the lowest rate of any demographic (Tate, 2017). Even though the data have been present for decades, retaining and graduating Black men is a continual challenge that many colleges and universities face daily without any resolution (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

Despite the litany of concerns in research surrounding the achievement and degree completion for Black men in higher education, effective solutions and strategies to resolve these concerns have yet to surface at the scale required to address the challenges for colleges and universities (Harper, 2012b). According to McBride (2017), as researchers and policy makers continue to highlight and grapple with the complexities of the underachievement of undergraduate Black men, the overall gap in graduation rates continues to rise between Black men and their White peers.

Finding strategies to support undergraduate Black men in their academic success and degree completion must be a high priority for researchers and professionals, given the dismally low national graduation rates of Black men (Lee & Ransom, 2011). It is the aim of this study to contribute to existing research and practice by exploring the lived experiences of Black men at PWIs. The goal of this study is to explore how successful Black men navigate socialization and support on a predominantly White college campus. The findings of this study may offer not only a deeper understanding of the lived reality of Black men, but also recommendations for colleges and universities to be better prepared to provide socialization and support for Black men in higher education.

Gender Disparities in Academic Success for Black Americans in Higher Education

Although academic success and degree completion gaps in higher education for Black men is a pertinent topic, it is critical to acknowledge and understand the gender disparities in academic success and representation that exist between two groups of Black undergraduates at PWIs. Researchers should separate Black undergraduates by gender when exploring their lived experiences at PWIs due to their differences in academic success and degree completion in college.

Black men across the United States are underachieving in almost every measurement of success in higher education when compared to Black women (Garibaldi, 2014). The inequalities in success and degree completion are most polarizing and revealing for Black undergraduate men in higher education when gender disparities within race and ethnicity are taken into consideration (Cuyjet, 2006; Libassi, 2018). In fact, as Black women have improved in almost all academic categories, Black men are performing far worse than they were several decades ago (Garibaldi, 2014).

Cuyjet (2006) noted that Black men and Black women have the most skewed ratio of men to women in higher education of any racial or ethnic group. Among Black undergraduates, Black women outnumber Black men by almost 2 to 1 nationally (Cuyjet, 2006). However, the disproportion of Black men to Black women at PWIs is not the only issue. The difference in number of bachelor's degrees conferred on Black men and Black women is even more illuminating. For example, Black women currently earn about two-thirds of all bachelor's degrees earned by Black Americans (Brooms, 2017; Slater, 1994). Thus, combining the two subgroups of Black men and Black women in this research would not accurately depict or capture the experiences of Black men at PWIs.

The evolving gender gap, disparity in success, and disproportion in degree completion among Black undergraduates are problematic. Completing college is more of a struggle for Black men than any other ethnic or racial subgroup (McBride, 2017). Researchers have revealed that Black men experience the lowest levels of achievement and most truncated degree completion rates in relation to their peer groups, which includes Black women (Harper, 2012a; Scott, 2012; Washington, 2013). These troubling data emphasize the need for further research that explores lived experiences of Black men independent from those of Black women in an effort to augment current services and cultivate innovative approaches that foster socialization and support for Black men, specifically at PWIs.

Currently, in reaction to the inadequate performance of Black undergraduate men, higher education has demonstrated a heightened awareness of the achievement and success of Black men through scholarship, research, and resources over the past 15 years (Harper, 2012a; Libassi, 2018). Across the United States, institutions are engaging in various strategies to improve the experiences and achievement of Black men in college, particularly at PWIs. Still, these strategic efforts and devoted resources have produced only lackluster results and little progress in success among Black undergraduate men (Harper, 2014b).

Perhaps the top reason for institutional failure is the deficit-based approach toward the retention and success of Black men that dominates the responses from higher education (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Through a traditional deficit-based lens, researchers seek to explain why Black men exhibit such low levels of degree attainment; specifically, colleges and universities ask why Black men are not ready for success in higher education. As Palmer and Maramba (2010) and Harper (2014b) have contended, the deficit-based approach adds to the problem of attrition for Black men because it misinforms institutions, damages perspectives of

educators, and is counterproductive to the success of Black undergraduates in higher education. In contrast, an asset-based model is interested in identifying high achievers and learning from their successes (Harper, 2014a). An asset-based or anti deficit-based model sees the gifts and talents of Black learners, asking how colleges and universities can be ready to create space for the unique learning opportunities provided to students.

My study departs from the more dominant deficit-based lens with regard to race, gender, and academic success and offers an opportunity for counter-storytelling narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) from successful Black undergraduate men themselves. Instead of using a deficit-based lens, I purposefully sought themes that would speak to and explain the resiliency of Black undergraduate men. My study aims to fill gaps in existing research by helping to understand the college experiences and academic success of Black men, while also encouraging future research. This study specifically draws on successful juniors and seniors in college to explore the barriers of socialization and support they experience as Black men at PWIs.

Socialization and support are relevant and timely to the status of Black men in higher education (McGaskey et al., 2016). Socialization and support are factors that contribute to success and degree completion of Black men (Harper, 2012a; Jack, 2019; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; McGaskey et al., 2016). Through detailed exploration of the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization and support, barriers in their success may be exposed and intervention strategies identified. Further, this research provides timely recommendations for colleges and universities to better serve and educate Black men in college as they navigate socialization and support.

By intentionally studying Black men who are successful at a PWI, I incorporated an anti-deficit based approach. As a researcher, I wanted to understand why these participants are

successful, while cross-referencing with my own experiences, so that I could identify strategies and encourage researchers to focus on success, rather than failure. The integration of an anti-deficit approach for higher education professionals is a mechanism to see the glass as half full, as opposed to half empty. Intentionally, the anti-deficit approach allows high-achieving Black men at PWIs to share their reflections, experiences, and advice as solutions (Harper, 2012a). I explored the lived experiences of undergraduate Black men and identified best institutional practices that contribute to their success in navigating socialization and support at PWIs, while applying an anti-deficit approach.

Problem Statement

Deficit and anti-deficit based approaches are well known in peer-reviewed higher education literature (Harper, 2010; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Despite advances in literature concerning anti-deficit based approaches, missing from the higher education research is a deeper understanding of the critical dialogue among students that seeks to expose barriers of socialization and support for Black men at PWIs (McGaskey et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis and counter-storytelling study is to explore the critical dialogue among three Black undergraduate men at a PWI to expose barriers to socialization and support by considering their lived experiences. Integrated in this study is a qualitative research method to provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Black undergraduate men, with autoethnographic narratives from the researcher woven throughout. This analysis provides an understanding of socialization and support, along with recommendations for improving practices at colleges and universities.

Research Questions

1. Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to socialization in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

2. Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to support in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

Significance of the Study

Discussing barriers of socialization and support at PWIs in relation to race is significant and relevant. It gives underrepresented groups, such as Black undergraduate men, a voice and moves this subgroup from the margins to the center of future conversations surrounding socialization and support, which may increase their achievement, degree success, and satisfaction with experiences in higher education. Ladson-Billings (2017) asserted that racism is common. Race is a factor that is not always visible, but plays an instrumental role in the inequities students of color experience in higher education. Delgado (1995) explained, "Racism is not a series of isolated acts but is endemic in American life, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically" (p. 82).

Similarly, policies, practices, and systemic issues that perpetuate racial disparities in academic achievement in a variety of ways due to race are deeply rooted in higher education. Looking closely into perceived barriers of socialization and support may offer solutions to many problematic policies, practices, and systemic issues for Black men at PWIs. Social construction of racism perpetuates the way people experience and make meaning of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Systemically, the social construction of racism is pervasive in higher education. The data analysis is relevant and needed to improve the socialization and support for Black men and improve their overall lived experiences at PWIs.

Conversations about race are sometimes avoided, but race can affect the ability of Black students to acclimate to college academically and socially (Tate, 1997). By exploring the challenges of racial inequities that contribute to degree attainment at a PWI, this study will secondarily highlight the resilience of successful Black students in higher education while exposing barriers to socialization and support in their experiences. This study departs from the familiar narrative of Black men underachieving and failing to earn college degrees. Instead, this study helps to fill gaps in the literature by using an anti-deficit lens and celebrating the triumphant stories of successful Black men who excel socially and academically at a PWI.

Research Design

The research design that aligns with the research questions is interpretive phenomenology merged with critical race counter-storytelling methodologies and autoethnographic narrative. Moustakas (1994) stated that "phenomenology is rooted in questions that give direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced" (p. 59). Smith and Osborn (2015) identified interpretative phenomenology as a qualitative approach that aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experiences. Interpretive phenomenology is designed to examine topics that are deeply complex, ambiguous, and emotional, making it a fitting design to explore how Black men navigate socialization and support at a PWI. Correspondingly, Smith et al. (2009) described interpretive phenomenology as a "qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (p. 1). Rather than fixing experiences in an abstract category, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is concerned with exploring experience on its own terms (Smith et al., 2009).

Critical race theory (CRT) and institutional betrayal theory (IBT) serve as the theoretical frameworks of this study, while using counter-storytelling as a methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) paired with critical autoethnographic narrative (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014) from the researchers journaling and lived experiences. The grouping of CRT and IBT allows for the exploration of how social structures of domination produce racialized oppression for the participants of this study, while also holding institutions accountable for their lived experiences at a PWI.

Critical race theory and institutional betrayal theory are useful in this study to expose ways in which inequities of socialization and support for Black men in higher education reveal institutional racism. The decision to combine CRT and IBT creates a form of critical phenomenology by providing counter-storytelling narratives that challenge dominant narratives constructed by deficit-based approaches for helping Black men. Most often, these dominant narratives are not inclusive of the thoughts and perspectives of undergraduate Black men themselves. In contrast, this study deliberately seeks and welcomes the thoughts, perspectives, and stories of lived experiences from three successful Black undergraduate men and the researcher.

Theoretical Frameworks

According to Crotty (1998), the theoretical framework informs the methodology and establishes perspectives in which research, processes, and contexts are situated, including the nature and wording of the research questions. As outlined in the research design, this study applies two theoretical frameworks—CRT and IBT—to develop a robust method of critical phenomenology in search of counter-storytelling and meaning making that includes the voices and perspectives of undergraduate Black men to explain their lived experiences at a PWI.

Critical race theory, which informs the methodology of this study, was first introduced as a legal perspective to argue that race must intentionally be recognized and researched in law and civil rights cases (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT has been applied to college campuses beginning with Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman since the 1970s. Bell and Freeman believed storytelling would develop compassion and humanity toward Black people in response to racism and discrimination in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Similarly, this theoretical framework guides this study by fostering space for the counter-storytelling narratives of Black men to encourage empathy and humanity from the readers, and the institutions that have betrayed and oppressed them in higher education.

Institutional betrayal theory is an extension of betrayal trauma theory. Smith and Freyd (2013) outlined that IBT refers to wrongdoing perpetuated by an institution upon individuals who rely on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond appropriately to wrongdoing by members of that institution. "Institutional betrayal is a description of individual experiences of violations of trust and dependency perpetrated against any member of an institution in a way that does not necessarily arise from an individual's less-privileged identity" (Smith & Freyd, 2014, p. 577). The principles of IBT include acts that are both apparently systemic and apparently isolated, acts of both omission and commission (Freyd, 2021).

According to Carroll (2017), individuals have an acute ability to recognize betrayal in others. Carroll (2017) contended that the intersection of IBT and CRT encourages systemic institutional change around betrayal in affirming talents and skills of underrepresented populations with regard to race and gender. Similarly, the intersection of race and gender, specifically at institutions of higher learning, is a foundational base for my study to expose the betrayal of Black men by PWIs. Black men must navigate and negotiate issues related to race,

underrepresentation, and lack of support in higher education at PWIs (Tate, 2017). Black undergraduate men at PWIs also exist in and navigate daily a learning environment and institution where they are required to negotiate spaces that are not free of any kind of White dominance (Brooms, 2017; Tate, 2017). As a result, it becomes the institution's responsibility to promote inclusion and not betray the needs or trust of Black college men in institutions of higher learning, specifically PWIs.

Methodology

The methodology of this study is qualitative. Data collection and analysis will be a combination of focus group interviews paired with critical autoethnographic reflections and writing. My qualitative approach is designed to explore the critical dialogue among successful Black undergraduate men to expose barriers of socialization and support in their lived experiences at a PWI. Kim et al. (2017) suggested that qualitative research should be conducted when a matter needs to be explored through interviewing. DeMarrais (2004) defined interviewing as a "process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p. 54). To ensure an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences through their critical dialogue, focus group interviews are applied in the data collection process. Focus group interviews are useful in this study to facilitate necessary group discussions. Palmer et al. (2010) believed focus group interviews might elicit more practical and experiential reflection than a one-on-one interview. Stimulating group discussion in this study offers opportunities to identify areas of convergence, divergence, nuances, and commonality in the participants' narration, which is significant to the findings of this study.

Methodologically, these focus group interviews allow the researcher to gain wide-ranging knowledge and an in-depth understanding of the experiences with the phenomenon. In addition, the interviewer will be open and flexible to change contingent on what surfaces in the interviews. In qualitative research, the researcher has permission to facilitate things that are conversational in nature to gain an in-depth understanding (DeMarrais, 2004; Creswell, 2007). Qualitative researchers seek to understand phenomena within a naturalistic setting by focusing on the stories and experiences of participants (Creswell, 2013). To understand these phenomena, descriptors and explanations are purposeful in qualitative research. Tracy (2010) noted that thorough, quality research is manifested by a rich complexity of abundance. "Qualitative research attempts to understand and explore a problem, often with the intent to transform the world" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). By using qualitative research to gain an in-depth understanding of the barriers of socialization and support in the experiences of Black men at PWIs, I sought to identify key resources, practices, and strategies to foster success for Black undergraduate men at PWIs.

My researcher journal, full of reflections as a Black man working at three PWIs and as an undergraduate student at a PWI enriches the depth of this study by creating a critical autoethnographic thread (Boylorn & Orbe, 2013) of this dissertation. My lived experiences allows for better interpretation and meaning making of the data collected through the focus group interviews. The autoethnographic data that I carry with me in intellect and journaling are data points working together through the data collection and analysis process to create an interpretive socially constructed context, which will be described with more depth in my subjectivity statement later. Below I define the key terms that will be used in this study to create a comprehensive understanding of the intended terminology for readers.

Definition of Terms

Black: People of African descent living outside of the African continent due to a history of experiences that include ancestral displacement caused by slavery. Black is an inclusive term for community members of the African diaspora, some of whom may prefer African Canadian, African Caribbean, or African American. Historically, other names imposed on this group of people included Negro or Colored. Black is capitalized to accentuate its cultural and political connotations (Amoah, 2013).

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs): A college or university founded historically for the education of Black people in America (Samuels, 2010).

Lived experiences: "A reflexive or self-given awareness that inheres in the temporality of consciousness of life as we live it" (Dilthey, 1985, p. 580).

Predominantly White institution (PWI): A postsecondary education institution in which White people account for 50% or more of the student enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

Socialization: "The process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make them more or less effective members of their society" (Brim, 1996, p. 3). Socialization is a process that occurs in stages over the course of a student's college experience, leading to a set of outcomes (knowledge, skills, and abilities) necessary for moving into academic and professional careers (Weidman et al., 2001).

Success: Black men persisting to their junior or senior year in higher education at a PWI while overcoming barriers of socialization and support.

Support: A network or organization of professional or personal contacts who provide an individual with practical or emotional care in fulfilling her/his dreams.

Expanding Autoethnographic Subjectivity: My Professional Roles and Perspectives

My subjectivity for researching Black men in higher education derives directly from (a) my undergraduate experience as a Black man at a PWI, (b) a shared familiarity navigating support and socialization in higher education, and (c) having the same racial identity as the participants. I am aware of the emotions, perspectives, and experiences I bring to this study and offer them in full transparency to the reader. Furthermore, I cannot dissociate the most salient feature of my identity, which is being a Black man who has successfully navigated through PWIs, from the participants that I research. Openly, it is my duty to *lift brothers as I climb* as stated in my introduction.

Although my subjectivity as an insider in this study has many complexities, there are clear benefits as well. According to Bhattacharya (2007), the relationship between the researcher and the participant influences the extent to which data are extracted from the participant and the quality of such data. By identifying as a Black man, I am perceived as an insider. Make no mistake about it: I am my brother's keeper! Correspondingly, I have a mentoring relationship with each of the participants, which has allowed me to observe their success in both curricular and co-curricular situations at a PWI.

My relationships with the participants have evolved over the past 3 – 4 years through their involvement in various student organizations, participation in weekend retreats, and learning in the classroom. The fellas and I have even come together in moments of despair in response to tragedies like the murder of George Floyd. Furthermore, with some of the participants I have crossed state lines to fundraise and attend culture and art exhibitions. We enjoy everyday dialogue about sports, classes, relationships, jobs, and our shared experiences as Black men at a PWI. Having a prior relationship and established rapport with each of the

participants is significant to allow for a natural and authentic conversation around the delicate topic of their lived experiences navigating socialization and support at a PWI. Our mutual relationships have been a conduit for us to touch the hearts of each other through intergroup dialogue, trust, and community building. These connections have allowed us to express our deepest vulnerabilities free of any judgement, which is envisioned to be a central theme of the focus group interviews in this study.

I currently serve students as an Assistant Vice President for Institutional Diversity and a Title VI Coordinator. In my position as an Assistant Vice President for Institutional Diversity, I cultivate and implement intuitional wide comprehensive and multi-year diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plans to form greater access, belonging, and support for underrepresented students, faculty, staff, and administrators at a PWI. In my role as the Title VI Coordinator, I respond to issues of biases related to race, color, and national origin. Additionally, I lead ongoing initiatives and trainings to raise awareness around bias and hate incidents that adversely affects members of the campus community, which most often include Black men as targets of these biases. Outside of my administrative responsibilities, I teach courses about dialogue, inclusion, and democracy to undergraduate students and a course about cultural agility to graduate students in effort to increase the knowledge of campus members around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Formally, I served as an Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Cultural Education. Prior to those roles, I was an Apartment Area Coordinator in Housing and Dining Services. I served in all my professional roles at PWIs, after being a student at a PWI.

The dual role of administrator and student is challenging but presents a unique perspective in this study. Similar to being a first-generation student, I consider myself a first-generation professional. For example, no one in my family or close to me has held similar

professional positions. In addition, a majority of the positions I held were newly created roles. Most often I am the highest-ranking professional who identifies as a Black man at the institutions I have served. Being the highest-ranked professional as a Black man is stressful because I can never escape my identity with regard to race and gender while at work. I am constantly aware of who I am, which continuously causes the need to code switch for various populations and key constituencies of the institution. I am usually the only Black man in every room I enter, which leaves little opportunity for error because I believe everything I do and say are under a microscope at all times due to underrepresentation.

There is an added weight and a deep responsibility for me not to fail. I don't want to let my ancestors that paved the way for me to reach these influential positions down. I refuse to give others the glory of perpetuating negative stereotypes of Black men based off my professional or scholarly performance. I find these experiences as a Black educator at a PWI to be daunting and even overwhelming at times. However, they are a lived reality for many Black men at PWIs, like myself.

My lived experiences will indeed enhance the findings of this study as the fourth participant to inspire systemic and institutional change for Black undergraduate men at PWIs. Personally, I am confident that the combination of my subjectivities and the wealth of knowledge I bring will enrich the research process, while also lending cultural sensitivity to the participants. As a Black senior-level administrator at a PWI, I have observed the disparities in the academic success and degree completion for Black men when compared to other groups. Conversely, I have observed that the stories of successful Black men are repeatedly silenced and overshadowed by the dominant narrative that Black men underperform in higher education. To counter this narrative, my approach is to give space for the silenced voices of high-achieving Black men at

PWIs in this study through a counter-storytelling. I hope readers can learn from the participants'

success and achievement in higher education, while adopting strategies to help other Black men

navigate socialization and support at PWIs. These lessons are part of the determination and

efforts to increase retention, success, and degree completion for Black men.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described how deficit-based models are impediments to the achievement

and degree completion of Black undergraduate men at PWIs. Moreover, socialization and

support are potential barriers in the undergraduate experience of Black men. My study used an

interpretive phenomenology design with an emphasis on critical counter-storytelling. The

appropriate theoretical frameworks, CRT and IBT, were needed to examine how Black men have

been invalidated both historically and presently by the colleges and universities they trusted

based on their race and gender. In Chapter Two, I review existing research relevant to the topic

of socialization and support for Black men at PWIs. Moreover, I summarize and provide an

examination of the research arguments found in the literature regarding the lived experiences of

Black men at PWIs.

Before concluding this chapter, I need to state to readers how much it frustrates me that

institutions don't always view the presence of Black men as a gift and take the time to listen to

us with a humble attitude to drive institutional change. Black men are marginalized at PWIs and

can offer valuable insight to race relations and institutional betrayal. Professionals and faculty

members at institutions spend a lot of time talking about, and at Black men about their needs, but

the continued missed opportunities are having conversations with them as undergraduates to

foster a better experience. On to Chapter Two!

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Through my research, I hope to present a fresh perspective on how undergraduate Black men experience higher education relative to their lived experiences in navigating socialization and support at a PWI. It has been helpful to unearth and examine previous scholarship in this area, while comparing my journal entries throughout my time in higher education to achieve this objective. The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize and report on the relevant research that have explored the lived experiences of Black men in higher education. Here are the four elements that I will review and discuss in this chapter: critical race theory, institutional betrayal theory, the meaning of higher education to undergraduate Black men, and examples of how Black men successfully navigate socialization and support. This literature review includes the barriers Black men face as they navigate socialization and support at PWIs. The chapter begins by examining the theoretical frameworks, CRT and IBT, and how they guide this study.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that was first created by academics studying legal policies. These academics were disturbed about the racial and ethnic oppression in society towards people of color based on policies and practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In response to the discrimination and injustices found in policies and practices, CRT emphasizes the significance of viewing laws in an appropriate historical and cultural context to deconstruct their racialized influence (Villalpando & Bernal, 2002). CRT establishes that colorblindness tactics disadvantages people of color and further advantages the White dominant group. CRT points out that administrators must recognize and be color-conscious in effort to systemically redress racial harms suffered by people of color instead of promoting colorblindness strategies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

It is helpful to understand the five core tenets of critical race theory. The tenets justify why CRT is one of the two theoretical frameworks that guide this critical phenomenological study are below.

1.   It is critical to recognize that racism is endemic to American life. Meaning that racism is ordinary, occurs every day, and is a fundamental part of American society.

2.   It is important to express doubt toward dominant claims of impartiality, objectivity, or color blindness approaches. Unequivocally, we must acknowledge and understand that Whites have benefited from racism in American life.

3.   It is essential to challenge history and insist on a contextual and historical examination of institutional policies through social thought, social relations, and socially reconstruction of concepts and perceptions that benefit dominant groups.

4.   It is vital to recognize the knowledge and ability of people of color by appreciating their overlapping identities and developing ways to acknowledge them.

5.   It is necessary to work toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. Marginalized groups must speak out for their voices and stories to be heard, valued, and respected (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Critical race theory works toward deconstructing problematic higher education policies and practice through examining literature, dialogue, and methodologies related to race, gender, and class by presenting how these social constructs of identity intersect to impact communities of color (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Higher education practices must center race and racism in research by challenging antiquated and traditional methods of practice.

Among the many methods used in higher education to raise awareness of disadvantaged groups are the following: exposure to knowledge about micro and macroaggressions,

consciousness of racism, integration of counter-storytelling, and the development of affinity spaces for underrepresented populations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theory uses counter-storytelling in the form of discussion, documents, and personal testimonies to allow marginalized groups to share stories that challenge the beliefs of the dominant group (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando & Bernal, 2002). This study encourages and documents the stories and lived experiences from the participants and researcher. Many of their stories acknowledge the benefits of affinity spaces.

Affinity spaces offer a distinct campus location that is authenticating, affirming, and supportive for underrepresented groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). They provide a safe and brave space free from the daily micro and macroaggressions and institutional racism marginalized populations experience. Through the establishment of affinity spaces, individuals and groups harmed daily by institutional racism discover that they are not alone in their experiences and marginality. Underrepresented individuals and groups become empowered community members by speaking out against racism, hearing the stories of others, and learning how their points of view are framed to make similar arguments themselves (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Indeed, empowering marginalized populations to address institutional racism is critical to promoting an anti-racist, inclusive, and equitable community in higher education. However, I argue that it is equally important to hold institutions accountable for betrayal, violations of trust, and harm caused to marginalized groups by its community members. Institutions often fall short of protecting the safety and well-being of underrepresented populations (Freyd, 2021). This study expects to raise awareness of the damage and betrayal towards marginalized groups caused

by PWIs, which is why I have chosen to nest critical race theory with institutional betrayal theory as guiding theoretical frameworks of this study.

Institutional Betrayal Theory

Institutional betrayal (IBT) refers to wrongdoings committed by an institution upon community members that are dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings (e.g. sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution (Freyd, 2021). Smith and Freyd (2013) noted that IBT holds members of institutions accountable for developing trust among those dependent on them for their safety and well-being. Freyd (1996) pointed out that the term institutional betrayal originated from literature on sexual assault, sexual harassment, and interpersonal violence. Freyd's (1996) research introduced the connection between institutional betrayal and betrayal trauma theory, which asserts that victims of abuse may purposely remain silent (or be unaware of the episode), especially if the perpetrator is a caregiver.

Freyd (2008) described childhood physical, emotional, or sexual abuse perpetrated by a caregiver as primary examples of betrayal trauma. Subsequently, Smith and Freyd (2014) added that when powerful institutions, such as churches, schools, government, and the military, act in ways that harm those dependent upon them, these experiences can be identified as institutional betrayal. This reality means that institutional betrayal can happen anywhere, regardless of the type of agency or whether it operates in the public or private sector (Smith and Freyd, 2013).

Recent scholarship has established several ways in which institutional betrayal may be applied to research. Smith and Freyd (2014) reported that researchers in a range of disciplines and settings have applied the concept of institutional betrayal to their studies over the past decade. These research areas include sexual assault, police brutality, military betrayal,

governmental betrayal, health care disparities (which include COVID-19 response), racial

discrimination, sexual orientation bias, betrayal in the high school experience, and betrayal in the

college experience. Freyd (2020) emphasized that trauma events can, and do vary depending on

the circumstances and characteristics of a traumatic event. It is important to note that some

situations can easily be identified as involving institutional betrayal, while others may not, such

as isolated incidents of macroaggressions compared to systemic issues of unjust policies towards

Black men.

Betrayal incidents can go unrecognized by both the individual betrayed and the institution

responsible for betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014). Freyd (1996) contended that victims are

sometimes apprehensive to disclose the betrayal they experience because they perceive it as

counterproductive to their own survival. As a result, institutional betrayal often goes

unacknowledged by the perpetrator and victim. Although institutional betrayal is

unacknowledged in many instances, research suggests that the willingness and ability to become

aware of institutional wrongdoings is growing (Smith & Freyd, 2014). IBT has important

implications that direct my research. By identifying institutional betrayal as the theoretical

framework for this study, I introduce strategies that expose barriers, but also point out

wrongdoing across the experiences of Black undergraduate men by personnel at PWIs. This

study marks the first time institutional betrayal has been applied in higher education to Black

undergraduate men in the context of navigating socialization and support at a PWI.

For that reason, Figure 1 illustrates how institutional betrayal can be applied to a higher

education setting in this study. Figure 1 demonstrates the role of institutional betrayal on a two-

dimensional continuum: apparently isolated and apparently systemic. Vertically, the axis ranges

on a continuum of institutional action from omission to commission. Omission is the action of

neglecting, excluding, or leaving out. Commission is the action of deliberate intent or giving

orders of exclusion. The horizontal dimension is to determine whether the incident was located

on a continuum from apparently isolated to apparently systemic.

Figure 1

Institutional Betrayal of Black Male Undergraduates and How It Informs the Study

Examples:
- An institutional cover up of a faculty, staff, administrator, or community member's wrongdoing
- An insufficient response to a report of microaggressions, bias, discrimination, hate speech, or hate crimes

Commission

Types of Institutional Action

Examples:
- Lack of retention and persistence efforts to support Black men in their journey to graduation despite creating access (e.g. scholarships, grants, etc.)
- Lack of representation, support, and socialization opportunities for Black men on campus

Apparently Isolated

Apparently Systemic

Initial Apparent Problem

Examples:
- A failure to notify Black men of support and access to socialization opportunities
- A failure to respond to reports of microaggressions, bias, discrimination, hate speech, or hate crimes

Examples:
- Not providing the support and support network needed for Black men to be successful in higher education
- Lack of socialization opportunities provided for oppressed groups, like Black men, in comparison to their peer groups

Omission

Figure 1. Institutional Betrayal of Black male undergraduates and how it informs the study

Note. Adapted from *Institutional Betrayal and Institutional Courage,* by J. J. Freyd, 2021 (https://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/institutionalbetrayal/).

The IBT model illustrates how all intersectional issues surrounding the individual and the institution are in the framework of institutional betrayal regardless of where they fall on the visual considering the continuum. It represents institutional failure and betrayal by practice and policies to hold institutions responsible for the experiences, safety, and retention of undergraduate Black men in a higher education context. Further, it provides an understanding of the role institutional members like, staff, faculty, and administrators, play in the harm endured by undergraduate Black men whether overt, covert, systemic, or isolated.

From previous research, institutional betrayal established the critical need for institutions to examine misconduct committed by staff, faculty, and administrators against marginalized community members (Gómez, 2015). These institutional efforts must be fully transparent, promote accountability, and build trust among members of the institution. IBT offers an opportunity to examine the responsibility of institutions to develop support and socialization opportunities for Black undergraduate men at PWIs. Therefore, this particular theoretical framework is useful to guide my research questions to analyze the factors that influence socialization and support.

Specifically, a full accounting of the structural challenges and experiences of racism on campus requires an analysis of the role and accountability of institutions. Other theoretical frameworks do not discuss the harm and betrayal perpetuated by the institution or the trust it engenders. It is essential to look at the roles and responsibilities of institutions in the lived experience of Black men. In effort to examine the roles of institutions and to effectively respond to the research questions, I chose to merge IBT and CRT, to frame this study. Likewise, just as it is necessary to understand the role of the institution and social constructs of race and gender,

understanding the history of Black men in education is imperative to address the research questions. The historical context of Black men in education sets the tone and impact of their past and current lived experiences in higher education at PWIs.

The Experiences of Black Men in Education

While a college degree increases the likelihood of employment, greater future earnings, and more personal satisfaction, the challenge in earning a degree differs based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Ottley & Ellis, 2019; Palmer et al., 2014). Historically, the higher education experience for Black men has been very different from their White peers since they began to enter higher education (Harper, 2015). For example, Black people were denied access to and equity in education for centuries before these challenges were encountered in higher education. Indisputably, injustices and challenges in education for Black people began with captivity, bondage, and enslavement of this population (Woodson, 1933/2013).

In an effort to maintain slavery, enslaved Blacks in the United States were deprived of the right to learn reading and writing (Woodson, 1933/2013). In fact, Black people could face punishment (or even death) for attempting to learn to read or write (Woodson, 1933/2013). Given the threat of death or physical harm, it was challenging to pursue education, gain academic knowledge, or become literate during slavery for Black people.

Following emancipation from slavery, the Reconstruction era began (Hallam, 2004). However, access to education remained a challenge for Black Americans. Despite the challenges of access to education, Black Americans viewed education as an integral step toward achieving equality, independence, and prosperity during Reconstruction (Neels, 2019). As Black Americans built lives as free people during Reconstruction, they keenly sought opportunities to learn to read and write (Hallam, 2004). Conversely, their opportunities to learn to read and write

were limited in access. In an effort to gain access to education, Black Americans first had to overcome strong opposition and oppression from the White majority.

In hope of challenging oppression, attaining financial assistance, and recruiting qualified teachers, Black Americans pursued help from the federal government's Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, which was established by Congress in March 1865 (Antietam National Battlefield, n.d.). Black communities opened schools to educate children as well as adults (Humphries, 1994). Still, many White businesses and landowners refused to rent land or buildings to Black Americans who wanted to use their properties for educational purposes to impede the efforts of advancement for Black people (DuBois, 1903/2016).

This challenge of finding land led to a strenuous struggle for education for Black Americans in their communities. They were forced to provide instruction in their communities while lacking just and equitable academic resources (e.g., scarce teachers, outdated textbooks, and dilapidated facilities) for decades (Humphries, 1994). Although education, resources, and amenities provided to Black Americans were unequal when compared to White American schools across the United States, Black Americans still persevered into formal education through their resiliency and perseverance.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1951) was filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas to address injustices and inequities in education. The objective of this particular lawsuit became the foundation to address the issues of a fair and equal education for all students. The lawsuit later rose to the Supreme Court level (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (p. 495). Though states had a lawful responsibility to integrate schools following the ruling, many refused and remained segregated. Eventually,

integration for all students in the United States occurred, but the underlying issue of White superiority was perpetuated in educational systems throughout the United States (Banks, 2009). Correspondingly, the effect of the aforementioned inequities can be felt in both K-12 educational settings and in higher education for many Black Americans and other racial and ethnic students today (Egan, 2019). There effects are so recent that there are even Black Americans still alive to tell the stories.

While this literature is valuable to my learning and readers, in my journal entry from four years ago, I find a different form of literature: I wrote about the good fortune I had to meet Mr. Ernest Green of the *Little Rock Nine*. This, learning from the elders who came before me, offers up another valuable layer of understanding the experiences of Black men in schools. Mr. Green is one of the first Black Americans to experience desegregated education because of the Brown V. Board of Education decision mentioned previously, which illustrates how fresh and pervasive institutional racism is for Black Americans even today. Mr. Green was the first to graduate of the nine students from Central Rock High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957.

In my role as Director of Cultural Education, I had the exclusive opportunity to introduce the distinguished Mr. Green, as a keynote speaker to members of the college. From the moment I met Mr. Ernest Green, I could tell we had an organic connection. He was laid back, extremely cool, and very smooth. I even spoke about it when introducing him. Sharing the floor with Mr. Green was an inimitable experience that I will never forget. I cherish this moment because I could be my authentic self without code switching. Following the event, Mr. Green and I began to have a free fluid conversation about anything that crossed our minds, including my visit to the Brown V. Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka, KS years before.

During our conversation, Mr. Green shared that he was planning to retire for the night in his hotel room. I thought to myself, "No way; the night is still young," which led to me inviting Mr. Ernest Green to an impromptu dinner with my wife, another administrator, a group of students, and myself. Mr. Green accepted the invitation without hesitation, and with a smile that could warm up Antarctica. Unintentionally, one of the dinner guests happened to be a participant in this study. His older sister also attended the dinner with us; she is a close friend of our family, we even call each other nicknames like Bro and Sis as terms of endearment for one another.

Before we departed campus, I asked Mr. Green what he had a taste for and he shared that he was in the mood for some scenery, good food, and a great adult beverage. Guess what, I knew the perfect spot in town for some scenery, good food, and a great adult beverage! The place was a small food district most notable for the enchanting atmosphere, the finest Italian cuisine, and best Italian wine and bread in town. Okay, okay, I know what you might be thinking, *why didn't this brother get him some something he couldn't get anywhere else*? I mean seriously, if you knew where I was, you would know the town was hurting for more ethnic restaurants and diverse options for grub. Needless to say, Italian it was! I called a couple spots and made reservations for a party of eleven. We loaded up our vehicles and headed over to the restaurant. The group demographics were ten Black Americans and one White woman. This event created an affinity space where we could all be ourselves, free of White dominance.

While waiting for our table, you could sense that the entire group felt like we were accompanied by our very own celebrity for the night. When other patrons of the restaurant would walk by, we would ask, "Can you guess who this is?" And then, go on and explain who he was and what his legacy meant to us. You would think Mr. Green would grow tired of our excitement—and us—but instead he embraced the excitement by taking pictures, shaking hands,

and conversing with so many customers and staff in the restaurant. Mr. Green was charismatic and full of energy the entire night. This was amazing to me considering he had just presented to a campus wide audience. Wow, what I would do to have that energy…

Once our table was ready, Mr. Green and our group broke bread and shared so many laughs together; it was as if he was another one of us. In the middle of our meal and laughs, there were stories from Mr. Green of success and struggle in his pursuit of education as a Black man. Please let me preference: I would never insinuate that I knew what Mr. Green and the other eight members of the *Little Rock Nine* experienced or withstood to graduate in this time of agonizing oppression and discrimination for Black Americans. However, through his vulnerability and openness in describing how he survived the *Little Rock Crisis* that followed desegregation of education in Arkansas, along with our attempts to listen with empathy, we could all feel the pain and hurt caused by institutional racism, oppression, and betrayal exuding from his very lips and nonverbal gestures.

Mr. Green told stories of the Governor and other Whites at the time demanding a change in decision to desegregate education, and the hate that spewed in attempt to prevent their enrollment. He described the emotional hardship, physical fatigue, and internal fear of death that he and others in the *Little Rock Nine* faced daily in effort to graduate from one of the first desegregated high schools in America. The historical event was so significant for the Civil Rights Movement and all Americans that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. attended his graduation to celebrate this accomplishment and momentous breakthrough of desegregating education for Black Americans.

Mr. Green's testimony epitomized counter-storytelling because what I learned – the nuances of his individual hurt could not be found in any textbook or literature, it had to come

straight from his heart and soul. Only he could describe his pain, emotions, and triumph in this way. He spoke openly about not trusting the high school. When the students needed support from the institution it was nowhere to be found. They often had to rely on themselves for help and persistence. It was obvious he experienced institutional betrayal based on the social construct of his race and the embedded institutional racism in America.

Mr. Green's stories literally made me breathless, but thirst for more of them at the same time. Hearing Mr. Green's story was inspiring and a call to action for brothers in academia, like myself. Unquestionably, Mr. Green's actions, fortitude, and perseverance to conquer institutional racism was a game changer for Black Americans to access and experience desegregated education. Without his actions, fortitude, and perseverance, I could not do what I love most – serve as an educator to all Americans in a system of desegregated education. In essence, Mr. Green *lifted me and other Black Americans as he climbed* a system of education that was not built with us, Black Americans, in mind.

While progress was made by Mr. Green and other Black leaders in the Civil Rights Era to disrupt systemic and institutional racism in America, the current state of affairs in higher education is entrenched with similar issues and problems, just less noticeable as overt racism. These challenges continue to prolong the fight to eradicate racism in education, specifically for Blacks around institutionalized racism among other systemic issues on college campuses (Brooms, 2018). Institutionalized racism is a system that continuously oppresses marginalized communities, particularly Black Americans and other communities of color, through an assortment of mechanisms (Head, 2020). Institutional racism toward Black students, particularly Black men, may include the following: inequities in resources, lack of diverse faculty and staff

representation, biases rooted in policies, deficit-based practices, little socialization opportunities, and poor academic support (Libassi, 2018; McGaskey et al., 2016).

The increase in Black men pursuing higher education, along with the returns of earning an undergraduate degree, point to an immediate need to explore and understand their lived experiences in higher education. Understanding how Black students effectively navigate socialization and support at PWIs is significant to increasing their ability to succeed academically and socially in higher education (McGaskey et al., 2016). It is anticipated that the achievements and barriers revealed in this study may inform policies and practices at PWIs. This includes better serving the growing number of Black undergraduates on college campuses and responding to the alarming number of Black men who do not persist to graduation due to barriers of socialization and support at PWIs in their lived experiences.

Socialization for Black Men at PWIs

Socialization is the process by which persons obtain the knowledge, skills, and abilities that make them more or less effective members of their society. (Brim, 1996). It is a process that occurs in stages over the course of a student's college experience, leading to a set of outcomes (knowledge, skills, and abilities) necessary for moving into academic and professional careers (Weidman et al., 2001). "Socialization can be thought of as having both individual (cognitive developmental) and organizational (affective interpersonal) dimensions linked through patterns of acquisition and maintenance of memberships and participation in salient groups" (Weidman, 1989, p. 294).

Although socialization experiences are cumulative, the process varies depending upon individual and institutional characteristics (Twale et al., 2016). Furthermore, race and gender interact to provide a more comprehensive picture of intersectionality in student socialization

experiences (Twale et al., 2016). For example, Gittens (2014) studied how the intersection of race and gender influenced socialization experiences of students of color in the McNair Scholars Program at a higher education institution. The McNair Scholars Program is designed to prepare high-need or first-generation undergraduate students for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities (McNair Scholars Program, 2020). Following the study, Gittens reported that socialization opportunities provided an array of development opportunities for first-generation students in the McNair Scholars Program (many of them Black) by boosting self-confidence, helping them integrate socially, establishing a network of support, affirming abilities, and helping them advance to degree completion. Gittens's study, like many others, exhibits the positive effect socialization can have for Black men in higher education.

The Effect of Socialization on Black Men in Higher Education

Socialization opportunities at PWIs have a significant effect on Black undergraduates' lived experiences and success, both academically and socially, throughout college (Brooms, 2016). Socialization influences students by improving cognitive development (Padgett et al., 2010). For example, socialization provide opportunities for students to learn through engaging and participating on campus to boost their sense of belonging and feelings of inclusion (Guiffrida, 2006; Museus, 2008).

In Brooms (2016), students suggested that students' involvement in a socialization network, Black Male Initiative (BMI), helped develop their academic performances both directly and indirectly. Four major themes emerged from the data with respect to how Black men in college experienced their engagement in BMI programs: (a) sense of belonging, (b) gaining access, (c) academic motivation, and (d) heightened sense of self or feeling connected to a

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collective identity and consciousness among BMI staff and peers. These are all significant examples of the positive effect socialization can have on Black men in higher education.

Examples of Socialization for Black Men in Higher Education

Like Brooms (2016), Padget et al. (2010) argued that colleges and universities must observe the socialization effects of socioeconomic status and race to create targeted educational practices for different populations in higher education. Researchers have offered examples that demonstrate that Black students benefit from more intentional and focused academic socialization efforts, especially through their involvement in gender-centered programs and services (Brooms, 2016; Mincey et al., 2015).

Mincey et al. (2015) described initiative programs for Black men as nurturing, supportive, and encouraging, enabling them to enhance their collective identities and self-expectations. The participants highlighted that access to sociocultural capital helped to build community on campus, which ultimately supported their academic efforts and reaffirmed their cultural wealth. Although research continues to detail the challenges that many Black undergraduate men face, BMI programs can serve a critical role in supporting their retention and persistence efforts. Additionally, BMI-branded programs can resonate with students' holistic needs where they have opportunities to develop their identities and constructs of manhood even further (Brooms, 2016).

Socialization is important to the success of Black men in higher education at both peer-to-peer and student-to-faculty levels. However, after conducting a review of the literature, I learned there are few recent examples of institutions being successful at providing ample socialization opportunities to support Black men. Further, an examination of previous scholarship revealed that there is limited research that provides recommendations for

socialization to enhance the lived experiences of Black men experience at PWIs, which is why I offer the following counter narrative.

In my role as Assistant Dean of Students, I led numerous successful socialization experiences for first-generation students, students of color, and Black men. I had the privilege to serve as an Advisor to two groups that promote socialization opportunities in co-curricular settings through intentional programs and intergroup dialogue. Many underrepresented students distinguish these two organizations as their favorite aspect in higher education and their best memories in college. Like the students, I am convinced my involvement as an Advisor to these affinity groups will always be my best memories as a professional at a PWI. I saw myself in each of the students I served and mentored. Being their Advisor was the most rewarding responsibility and time of my career. There is not even a close second. I take great pride in helping as a resource to guide them to graduation through socialization and support opportunities.

To begin, I oversaw one student organization that supports first-generation college students in their pursuit of higher education. There were 55 first-generation college students in the program. The program builds community, offers social and academic support, and creates a reflective environment for students to participate in counter-storytelling techniques. The program teaches students how to navigate the college community, balance relationships between home and campus, and creates a network of support among peers and faculty that they can rely on.

The second student organization I advised was to support multicultural students (freshmen to senior) in their matriculation through college. The programming included a weekend retreat in the Fall semester, as well as a yearlong mentoring program between first-year students and upper-class students to create personal and professional development opportunities. There were 125 students of color in the organization. The program offered underrepresented

students the tools to navigate and acclimate to the campus culture while maintaining their identity and cultural values. Uniquely, all of the participants of this study have been a part of the organizations throughout their higher education experience, which has allowed us to grow closer and get to know each other beyond what meets the eye and surface. I believe our established and genuine relationships over the years will enhance the data because each of the participants are acquainted with me personally and professionally and have engaged in counter-storytelling with me in the past.

One of the methods of counter-storytelling I led for both organizations was a *Bonfire and S'mores* activity. The purpose of this activity is to grow closer and learn more about each other. I found in my journal from a few years ago, a description of this particular counter-storytelling technique. In my journal, I wrote that during *Bonfire and S'mores* activity, I gave the directions for everyone to take a sticky note and a pen and write down what challenges they think they might face during the school year. Next, I asked each student to write down what were their fears. Everyone went in a circle and shared (if they were comfortable of course) what they wrote. I gave only one rule: *no one speaks twice before everyone else has spoken once*. There were no parameters of what could be said or how long we each could speak. The stories were to stay in the group, but the lessons were to be shared with other marginalized individuals to help them overcome their fears at the PWI. When everyone was done sharing, we collectively ripped our sticky notes and threw them in the fire together.

The objective of the *Bonfire and S'mores* activity was to symbolically get rid of all our fears of being first-generation students and persons of color at a PWI. We acknowledge we were in the struggle together and here to support each other by tearing our fears up and throwing them into the fire together as a group. However, by sharing our individual stories prior to burning our

fears, we acknowledged the intersections of our identities and our individual nuances as first-generation college students and persons of color. Individually, we identified experiences that have repressed our success – which were our separate counter-storytelling narratives and personal to each of us. To the contrary, these experiences mentioned were not what the dominant narrative generalizes as universal challenges for us all. These counter-stories were unique to us each as individuals, which endorses the need for counter-storytelling narratives in this study. To keep our promise of not sharing the stories of others, even as we share the lessons learned, I will not go into the details of their individual stories; however, I will concede that their barriers mentioned in navigating socialization are relatable to the next section in many ways.

Barriers to Socialization for Black Men at PWIs

Despite the limited research of examples of successful socialization strategies, the literature is dense with discussion of socialization barriers that exist for Black men at PWIs. Examples of these barriers to socialization include disparities in socioeconomic status, precollege preparation, culture, language, religion, and group membership (Padgett et al., 2010; Twale et al., 2016; Walpole, 2007; Weidman, 1989). Higher education offers a culture of socialization for all undergraduate students; however, there is a distinction in the socialization experiences for Black men in higher education in comparison to their peers (Linley, 2018). Navigating socialization at PWIs exposes Black men to barriers that other student groups may not experience in higher education. For example, the lack of a critical mass of diverse faculty to address diverse student needs presents a barrier for Black men at PWIs; this matter is not an issue for White students (Twale et al., 2016).

Weidman (1989), who began the research on socialization barriers, contended that socioeconomic status is an important characteristic to consider for understanding student

socialization experiences in higher education. Similarly, Walpole (2007) believed that socioeconomic status contributes to a student's precollege background and academic preparation, as Weidman suggested. Both concluded that socioeconomic status is a part of an ongoing socialization process that affects how students experience college. Past studies that included socioeconomic status in research models have used it as a control, rather than investigating it as a variable whose effects are substantial to understand (Walpole, 2007). Previous scholarship that used socioeconomic status as a control for socialization is less compelling (Padgett et al., 2010). By choosing socioeconomic status as a control, rather than exploring it to determine the effects on socialization, researchers are generalizing all students as the same, regardless of their financial background.

Although socioeconomic status is critical to understanding socialization for students, there are other factors that affect how students experience socialization in higher education. Culture, language, religion, and group membership each contribute to the experience of students who are navigating socialization with a diversity lens (Padgett et al., 2010; Twale et al., 2016; Weidman, 1989). Twale et al. (2016) emphasized that a diverse, productive, and inclusive multigenerational intellectual community affects student socialization. The intersectionality of these two variables, race and gender, of Black men at PWIs influences their socialization experiences (Twale et. al., 2016). Additionally, McGaskey (2015) asserted that Black men often have to leave behind precollege knowledge and previous identities or communities, which may have negative consequences for their persistence in academic programs.

Other studies aimed to address diversity and socialization barriers for underrepresented students at PWIs. For instance, Linley (2017) introduced a critical constructivist study that examined the ways underrepresented students who serve as socialization agents (e.g., orientation

leaders, tour guides, and resident assistants) make meaning of their collegiate experience in relation to their identities. Linley's qualitative study used a criterion and snowball sampling technique to select thirteen undergraduate participants. Linley found that undergraduate students of color make meaning of campus culture by actively participating in counter spaces, which are sites of resistance where students of color embrace their identity and underrepresentation. Furthermore, students of color made meaning of their underrepresented status by contrasting their feelings with feelings of comfort from cultural centers (Linley, 2017). Students of color used meaning making filters like storytelling to counter the dominant narrative about racism and underrepresented students on campus (Linley, 2017).

Meaning making filters like storytelling serve as a screening tool between context and identity for students of color (Linley, 2017). Such filters are an attempt to counter racism and underrepresentation and serve as an act of resistance to the dominant narrative of the institution (Linley, 2017). To extend this research, Linley (2018) conducted a qualitative constructivist study with eleven recruited participants who identified as socialization agents. Linley found that while many students of color were successful at finding strategies like meaning making filters and cultural center support to navigate barriers to socialization at PWIs, others were unable to overcome these barriers due to racism that permeates the campus.

Linley (2018) found that faculty created barriers by disguising that the narrative of inclusion they promote for White students is the same narrative for students of color at their colleges or institutions. Linley explained that the narrative of students of color about racism in the classroom is vastly different from their White peers. Instead, if faculty speak about the differences in their student narratives, they can begin to address racism and enhance the classroom environment for all students.

Correspondingly, Ortiz et al. (2019) examined the barriers for Black men navigating professional support, such as faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals, at PWIs. Participants shared the strategies they learned to succeed in their majors, which included developing navigational strategies to find teachers who better supported their learning or provided mentorship, because the teachers did not seek them out (Ortiz et al., 2019). Ortiz et al. concluded that navigational capital, which is the skill to maneuver through social institutions, as essential to the success of Black undergraduates.

Despite barriers of socialization at PWIs, Black men are able to persist and graduate. Harper (2015) attributed the retention and persistence of Black undergraduate men to their resiliency in higher education. When Black men persist, it is indeed an accomplishment; however, it does not negate the difficulties they experienced in navigating barriers to socialization at PWIs. Moreover, a review of the literature demonstrates that there is limited research that identifies and explores the intersection of socialization and support barriers Black men experience at PWIs (Harper, 2015). This specific gap in the literature points to the need to expose the socialization barriers to increase the persistence and influence of the lived experiences of Black men at PWIs through supportive strategies.

Support for Black Men at PWIs

Navigating support is a critical pathway to persistence and success among Black men at PWIs (Jackson et al., 2013). The supportive and family-like environments provided by HBCUs nurture students' self-efficacy, racial pride, psychological wellness, academic development, and persistence (Palmer et al., 2014). Alternatively, at PWIs, Black men often experience an unwelcoming campus climate and perceive the institution to be hostile (Brooms, 2016). Despite

a history of structural and institutional challenges, there are Black men who achieve positive academic outcomes in higher education by navigating support successfully.

The Effect of Support for Black Men in Higher Education

Navigating support at PWIs has a profound positive effect on Black undergraduates' ability to overcome barriers and persist to graduation (Hope, 2018). However, learning to navigate support as Black men must begin prior to college enrollment (Anumba, 2015; Hope, 2018). Participating in college preparatory programs, taking advanced placement courses, having caring teachers, and gaining early exposure to college are key factors that influence college preparedness and readiness (Hope, 2018).

Anumba (2015) emphasized that enrollment in school or community-based college preparatory programs enabled participants to obtain necessary academic support and guidance that were pivotal in their decisions to attend college. Preparatory programs offered by staff to participate in college enriching activities at the K-12 educational level underline the importance of attending college and finding support. College exposure can be accomplished through participation in school or community-based field trips or hearing from guest speakers (especially college students). Schools must bridge opportunity and accessibility gaps by providing strategic opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Black students who come from these backgrounds, especially men, should be targeted for support by giving them access to enrichment and bridge programs (Anumba, 2015).

Examples of Support for Black Men in Higher Education

When students matriculate at PWIs from these bridge programs, they come with established support systems, strategies for maneuvering through academia, and a better understanding of expectations. As a result, these students possess greater anticipatory

socialization than students who do not participate in bridge programs. Additional mentorship, peer support, counseling, advocacy and financial programs are also essential (Twale et al., 2016).

In a qualitative semi-structured study, Hope (2018) identified financial support, caring professors and peers, small class sizes to facilitate discussion and class participation, access to resources, and a positive and interactive institutional environment as policies and practices of support that increase the retention and persistence of Black men in higher education. In a similar qualitative semi-structured study, Rhoden (2017) identified trust as an example of support. Rhoden explained that there are three types of support for Black men: (a) trust in themselves, (b) trust in "close" others, and (c) institutional trust. The findings of Hope and Rhoden demonstrate that institutions willing to provide a safe, nurturing, and trusting environment that recognizes their inherent needs of Black men can be an influential form of support. Trust manifests in Black men's ability to achieve academically. Trust in themselves, trust in close others, and institutional trust were all instrumental in the academic achievement of participants.

Barriers to Support for Black Men at PWIs

Barriers in the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization at PWIs is not an isolated issue; in fact, socialization is interconnected with the barriers Black men face navigating support at PWIs (McGaskey et al., 2016). A qualitative exploratory study led by McGaskey et al. (2016) highlighted the interconnectedness of socialization and support. They found that the majority of participants in their study relied on a relatively small number of individuals within their social support network. Further, this small group of support was racially homogeneous. There were a number of similarities in personal characteristics of participants and the members of their social networks (McGaskey et al., 2016). Homogeneous support can offer many benefits, but there are challenges too. For example, given the general low representation of Black men in

faculty and staff roles at PWIs, Black faculty and staff members of the support networks for Black undergraduate men often have to offer multiple types of support. The low representation of Black men in faculty and staff roles is problematic because the support may be out of their realm of expertise around the topic of socialization and support for Black men in higher education (McGaskey et al., 2016).

Black men sometimes have a false sense of pride that prevents them from reaching out for the support they need (McGaskey et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2016). The intersection of the lack of Black faculty support and the difficulty that Black men have in seeking support illuminates the interrelatedness of navigating socialization and support. In a study conducted by (Parker et al., 2016) a purposeful sampling technique was used to select 21 undergraduate Black men at PWIs. The purpose of the study was to explore their perceptions of campus climate and diversity-related issues via semi-structured focus group interviews. Three themes materialized following the interviews: (a) divergent feelings of safety and belonging, (b) institutional climate issues, and (c) lack of personal accountability (Parker et al., 2016).

Similarly, in a qualitative research study conducted by Ortiz et al. (2019), fourteen Black undergraduate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors participated in semi-structured interviews and responded to journal prompts. Data from the study illustrated the barriers that exist for Black men navigating support on predominantly White campuses. These researchers concluded that peer relationships, involvement in STEM activities, and high school preparation all contributed to helping Black students find success in STEM fields. Both Ortiz et al. (2019) and McGaskey et al. (2016) pointed to the need for dialogue among faculty, staff, and administrators to mitigate the issues Black men face at PWIs in navigating socialization and

support and the need to hold institutions accountable for Black men's lived experiences in higher education.

Personally, I lacked homogenous support as an undergraduate at a PWI. Comparable to one of the aforementioned barriers, I did not have a Black mentor to support my needs as a Black undergraduate man. The absence of a Black male role model had a profound effect on my sense of belonging in college. Check this out: I only knew one Black man on campus with a terminal degree as an undergraduate. However, I did not meet him until my second semester of my senior year in college. He was the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, and later would become my first mentor.

Candidly, when I saw him for the first time, it felt like I was seeing an alien. I joke a lot, but I am actually being somewhat serious here. I don't intend to be facetious if it comes off that way, especially since he was so instrumental in my life and redirecting my path. It was just that he was *out of this world to me* – something I had never seen before in my 22 years of life at the time. You have to realize, I wrote in my undergraduate journal that during my entire undergrad I had never met any Black man with these three letters behind their name—Ph.D.—as I described our first interaction.

The reality of underrepresentation of Black professional men played a significant role in my self-efficacy and experiences in college. There was no one that looked like me in leadership, which made my outlook for leadership seem bleak in my observation. When I met him, a Black administrator that I could dab up, embrace – or merely share my thoughts with devoid of any judgement for my Southside vernacular or upbringing, it was like, "Man, where the hell have you been all my life? Can we hit the restart button?" Honestly, it was the first time in college that I didn't have to code switch, outside of hanging with my boys, of course. Meeting my first mentor

was a breakthrough for me academically and personally. Our relationship established trust in the college, vulnerability with a professional, and allowed me to be myself in a White dominated academic environment. Admittedly, I am still working on the latter of the three, being my authentic self in spaces of White dominance. Nevertheless, I'll get there…

My mentor understood my story and believed in me the moment I shook his hand, which forced me to believe in myself like never before. There was a different level of personal accountability because I witnessed what success in my future could look like by gazing at his physical presence. I saw a real-life image of what I aspired to be – something that my family, the Southside of Chicago, and Finley Place Apartments could not provide no matter how hard they tried. Honestly, if had I not met him, at that exact moment, I don't know where I would be in life right now. It's petrifying to even think about, which I often do. Granted, I know it was God's divine intervention on my life. God used my mentor as a vessel to help identify my calling as an educator. Ironically, it is how we were introduced to one another.

Here is how the story goes. Senior year, I reached out to one of the few Black leaders on campus that I was acquainted with, a Black Admissions Officer. I explained to her that I reached my senior year; however, I was frightened because I did not know I what I wanted to do with my life after I graduated. The Admissions Officer and I did not have much of a relationship or any quality interactions prior to this meeting. I knew her by being passersby. When we would cross paths on campus, she would always speak to me and inquire about how my day was going. Apparently, I was unaware at the time of the importance of a mentor; or even how to find one, for that matter. Despite my ignorance, she was very aware of what a mentor could mean to my success. She understood how substantial it was for Black men to find homogenous support. I consider this evidenced by her actions and words. The Admissions Officer stressed to me that as

much as she would like to help me, she believed I needed to connect with her colleague, the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, to offer a Black man's perspective in my career exploration.

When I first met her colleague, my soon-to-be mentor, he was patient with me. He took the time to share how proud he was that I had made it to graduation without any mentorship and involvement on campus. He even constructively criticized my baggy dress and provided perspective by explicitly saying when I come his office to make sure I dress appropriately because there could always be an opportunity awaiting me. "*Quincy, you have to dress for the position you want to have, not the position you do have*," he shared. Following a few meetings of career exploration, I decided to pursue graduate school in Adult and Higher Education at the same institution as my undergrad, NIU. I figured this would give me more time under his mentorship and the opportunity to identify exactly what I wanted to do in higher education through experience (not knowing my calling to be an educator was soon-to-be revealed to me).

My mentor kept his word about opportunity and later introduced me to the Director of Residence Life during a visit to his office. He advocated for me to have a graduate assistantship in Residence Life to provide experience and financial support in my graduate journey. Unfortunately, I bombed my first interview and did not get the graduate assistantship. Due to my lack of campus involvement, I was just not ready. However, he did not give up on me. In fact, he worked twice as hard with me. He provided opportunities for me to shadow him. In addition, introduced me to a Black Hall Director to provide peer-to-peer support in our journey as Black men at a PWI. As I ponder on it now, I believe my mentor must have also realized how advantageous it was for Black men to have homogeneous support by his actions as well.

My mentor sent the Hall Director and me to our first conference, the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), purposely to attend the African American Male Summit being hosted in Philadelphia, PA. He even scheduled a lunch for me to meet with his colleagues from across the U.S., despite him not attending the conference himself. His only request was that I come back and share my experience with him during our next meeting.

I was too prideful to show it at the time, but I felt like I made it! I mean really made it! It was extremely hard to keep all my emotions bottled up inside during that lunch. I was in disbelief that I was rubbing elbows with these esteemed Black men and senior leaders in higher education. It was like a buffet of successful Black men with samples of everything I wanted to be in life sitting right in front of me. The best part of the buffet experience was that I had enough room and time to experience them all.

When I returned home, I was convinced of the direction I wanted to go in my future. It was my goal to earn a Ph.D. in higher education and one-day serve as a Vice President at an institution of higher learning. I worked harder than ever before my first year of graduate school as a student and an intern for Student Involvement and Leadership Development.

The following year, I interviewed once again for the same Graduate Hall Director position. But, guess what? I did not bomb the interview this time. In its place, my performance was the bomb that went off like fireworks. My mentor and I celebrated at one of our favorite breakfast joints in town. I remember him telling me at the table, "*You may not always be the smartest person in the room. In fact, I am not always either. However, never give anyone the luxury of saying they outworked you – carry that with you, and you will be successful I promise.*"

I get chills to this day just thinking about that moment in my life. I carry that advice he

gave me every day. It has created a relentless work ethic and a *Can Do* mindset and attitude in

everything I do. I attribute the work ethic and mindset to be the prominent reason for my

perseverance and success as a Black professional at PWI.

I understand there will never be a way to repay my mentor for everything he has done.

Still, I give my best effort by being what he has meant to me by *lifting other brothers as I climb*.

Despite my success story of navigating support and gaining socialization opportunities by means

of my mentor, not all Black undergraduate men at PWIs are privileged in this same way. There

remains a gap in socialization and support opportunities for Black men. I mean, just consider that

I did not receive either socialization or support until the second semester of my senior year of

college. Moreover, my review of the literature revealed similar gaps in navigating socialization

and support for Black undergraduate men at PWIs, which I will detail in the next section.

Current Gap in the Literature

Literature surrounding socialization and support suggests that there is a need to

investigate the barriers that exist at PWIs for underrepresented students (McGaskey et al., 2016).

Missing from the higher education research is the influence of critical dialogue among students

that seeks to expose barriers to socialization and support for Black men at PWIs, which is the

goal of this study. By creating a space for critical dialogue and identifying the barriers, it is my

hope that the findings reported can be a resource for higher education personnel to effectively

address inequities in socialization and support in the lived experiences of Black men at PWIs.

The literature review illuminates a critical need to include faculty, staff, and

administrators in critical dialogue with students to identify solutions. The literature reveals a

commonality in the findings of previous studies that suggest a lack of professional training for

faculty, staff, and administrators that would raise awareness about racism at PWIs (Linley, 2017, 2018; Parker et al., 2016; Twale et al., 2016). Moreover, faculty skill-building is needed to address the frequent macro or macroaggressions on college campuses, whether in the classroom or in hiring practices (Egan, 2019; Linley, 2018; Twale et al., 2016). Another significant theme that emerged from previous scholarship is the need for more supportive and equitable environments, including initiative programs for men or other support networks (Egan, 2019; McGaskey et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2016).

Egan (2019) expressed an acute need to construct a more supportive and equitable environment that encourages professionals in higher education to create and support thriving initiative programs for Black men. He suggested a three-pronged approach for faculty and staff: a hiring search toolkit, a biases video or workshop, and professional mentoring. Parker et al. (2016) shared similar recommendations, suggesting that academic and student affairs professionals prioritize support for the growth of Black men at PWIs by developing programs that help Black men value their own communal identity while empathizing and collaborating with other oppressed groups. Finally, McGaskey et al. (2016) reported that support was racially homogeneous for Black men at PWIs. The observations of homogenous support (lack of support from majority faculty and administrators) provided by McGaskey et al. (2016) were parallel to the reasoning of Parker et al. (2016) and Egan (2019). The researchers each insisted on placing responsibility on institutions, and specifically faculty and administrators, to establish mechanisms of socialization, such as initiative and mentoring programs for Black men to enhance their lived experiences and increase their success at PWIs.

This reality is important because the literature supports the lack of accountability of PWIs and the failure of faculty, staff, and administrators to participate in ongoing training and

development that fosters socialization and support. The background of this study and research problem lies in the missed opportunities of previous scholarship to facilitate critical dialogue among students to addresses barriers to socialization (McGaskey et al., 2016). To that end, this study contributes to higher education literature pertaining to the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization and support at PWIs by including the much-needed voices of Black undergraduate men. Moreover, research pertaining to socialization and support may raise awareness of the issues of retention and success for Black men in higher education and call for solution-oriented practices from faculty, staff, and administrators in response to the experiences of the participants of this study.

Chapter Summary

CRT and IBT were introduced in this chapter as the theoretical frameworks that inform this study. The introduction of CRT is useful because it places race and gender at the center of the conversations surrounding socialization and support. IBT holds the institution accountable for its failure to provide support for those who depend on the institution and their resulting distrust (Smith & Freyd, 2014). The current study applies CRT and IBT to higher education in new ways, taking the lessons learned in understanding institutional betrayal in association with critical race theory to help understand nuanced issues on campus for Black men. This chapter offered a review of current literature pertaining to the lived experiences of Black men at PWIs, along with stories of my own experiences. The literature suggests that the lived experiences of Black men are shaped by socialization and support opportunities and services provided. Various studies have exposed the barriers to socialization and support that Black men must successfully navigate to persist and graduate from a PWI.

The review of the literature revealed gaps in the level of socialization and support provided to Black men in comparison to their peer groups in, which is why this study seems timely. In the next chapter, I fully explain the methods I undertake in this study. The counter-storytelling poem I will provide in Chapter Three is filled with the emotions and vulnerabilities of me as the researcher. The poem marks the intersection of stories, people, and moments in my academic journey at PWIs that situates my positionality as a researcher in this study. Get ready to learn more about me through poetry. Get ready to meet the unabashed fourth participant of this study!

Chapter 3 - Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the qualitative methodology of this study. I discuss my approach to interpretive phenomenological analysis research design with autoethnographic counter-storytelling narratives woven throughout. I describe the participant selection process and the researcher site. I share the data collection methods, data management, representation, and analysis sections to explain how I operationalize an interpretive phenomenological study along with autoethnographic narratives. I also introduce readers to counter-storytelling techniques with myself as the fourth participant. Outlined in the final section are academic rigor and trustworthiness to assure confidentiality and adherence to ethics. I begin with describing my researcher positionality to situate myself within the inquiry for readers.

Researcher Positionality

Discussion of my positionality as the researcher within the inquiry allows me to share with readers the values, perspectives, and experiences I bring to this study. This is important because I do not intend to separate this positionality from the data collection and analysis process. Explicitly, as a researcher, I am interested in studying the lived experiences of Black men in higher education because these Black men are a reflection of me as an undergraduate. Now, my obligation and intentions are to *lift other brothers as I climb*. This study is my vehicle to drive other brothers, like myself, to their academic destination (graduation) at PWIs. While I realize the participants and I are alike in many regards, I am also aware that the intersections of our identities make us original and offer valuable perspectives that will collectively contribute to the findings of this study in their own unique way.

To give readers a deeper understanding of my researcher positionality, I describe the sentiments engulfed in these similarities and differences in a poem I wrote to the participants

called "I Am the Researcher" (Figure 2). I hope this poetry makes it clear to readers how my vulnerabilities and scholarship are built on a dream that began before me, and is more pressing than ever.

Figure 2.

I Am the Researcher

"I Am the Researcher"
Quincy A. Bevely

I am the Researcher
Or so it seems
We each share a piece of King's dream
Which it makes it hard not to say, "Yes, I know what you mean"
Of course, I want to grab him and say, "Wow, I experienced that same damn thing"
However, this may seem partial or maybe even awkward for this young king

I am the Researcher
In addition, I am the searcher
On a quest to study why as learner
He lacked the support, structure, and nurture
The fact is no one had his back
No one offered to get him on the right academic track
Sure, family and friends came in packs and bundles
Conversely, it was not enough for the higher education jungle
Rumble, young man, rumble

I am the Researcher
Although, I am also the Returner
It is now my duty to let him know he's no longer a loner
Black men would like to be learners
And earners of college degrees to further achieve
Melanin does not equate to underperforming
Instead, socialization for all is equity in learning

As I am the Researcher,
He must first trust in me
This goes beyond research definitely
Plentiful worries undoubtedly
Uncertainties about Black men retreating
While lenders continue repeating
Cycles of Black men leaving
To pay high student loan interest without completing
We know education is far from free,
Nonetheless, financial freedom is what we all hope to graduate and see
Is this the "return on investment" the institution promised my brothers and me?
If so, can I please have a refund immediately?

We need to tell this counter-narrative in a hurry
For someone else may soon crash or experience the same flurry
It brings me fury
To see another Black man bury MLK's dream
More importantly, their own story
Due to sentencing from the academic jury
To the contrary, institutional betrayal
Indisputable, is what frails and fails Black college men
I am the Researcher
Do you know what I mean?

Research Questions

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis and counter-storytelling study is to explore the critical dialogue among three Black undergraduate men at a PWI to expose barriers to socialization and support by considering their lived experiences. As mentioned earlier, I also see myself as a fourth member of this study, a participant-researcher of sorts, given my own experiences as a Black man at a PWI, and the lens I bring to understanding and analyzing the findings. The following research questions guide my study.

1.   Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to socialization in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

2.   Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to support in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

<div align="center">

Research Design

</div>

The methodology of this study is qualitative. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that qualitative research encompasses the belief that people construct knowledge as they engage in meaning making of an activity or phenomenon. Flick (2014) characterized qualitative research as relevant to analyze perspectives while taking into consideration the researcher's reflections on the research as part of the process of data collection and analysis. Creswell (2013) stated that in qualitative research, individuals construct reality in an interaction with their social world as they engage in the world they are interpreting.

Rather than statistics, qualitative research methods employ descriptive procedures and open-ended questions to generate meaning and understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Mosselson (2010) explained that researchers gain an in-depth analysis of a specific person's perspectives, as opposed to using quantifiable measurements to generalize a

participant's thoughts onto a large population. The need to access comprehensive and in-depth accounts of each participant's lived experiences at PWIs both relates and points to why conducting qualitative inquiry is relevant to respond to the research questions. Thus, qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate research design to answer the research questions.

My selection of qualitative inquiry derives from the need to explore lived experiences and attain descriptive personal accounts of Black men in higher education. Furthermore, the necessity for rich detail in participants' responses is required to address the research problem related to the challenges colleges and universities have in providing socialization and supportive opportunities Black men to achieve success. Therefore, a qualitative approach is most appropriate to guide this study. It is the stories, narratives, and voices from Black undergraduate men that I seek to share with academia, readers, and my professional community.

Methodology: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis with Autoethnographic Counter-Storytelling Narratives

IPA was the research design used for part of this study; it is appropriate for the research questions of my study. In choosing this research process, "we commit ourselves to exploring, describing, interpreting and situating the means by which our participants make sense of their experiences" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 40). Hence, the rationale for selecting IPA as the study's research design is to explore and gain personal accounts and reflections of the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization and support at a PWI. Additionally, with the emphasis on critical race theory and institutional betrayal theory, there was a need to utilize counter-storytelling methodology (Solórzano and Yosso, 2000), along with a critical autoethnographic components (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner; 2010) to co-construct a critical interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

IPA began as a qualitative method for studies in health psychology (Benner, 1994; Smith, 2004). In recent years, IPA is common in human, social, and health sciences (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology is rooted in inquiries that give direction and focus to meaning, and in subjects that sustain an inquiry, arouse further interest and concern, and account for passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Similarly, the research questions of this study focused on meaning-making and evoked passion, concern, and intrigue from the participants involved in the study.

A phenomenon is explored as the researcher is interested with the detailed examination of lived experience in an interpretive phenomenological study (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). According to Smith et al. (2009), the purpose of IPA is to focus on people's experiences and/or understanding of a particular phenomenon. This study focused on the experiences of Black men in higher education and on understanding how this subgroup makes sense of the phenomenon of navigating socialization and support. Smith et al. (2009) affirmed that the researcher's perceptions and views of each participant reflect both the phenomena and their interpretation by forming alternatives ways of understanding.

The relevance of and appropriateness for implementing an IPA in this study is justified by its central tenets that align with research questions and the descriptive responses needed. According to Horrigan-Kelly et al. (2016), the tenets of IPA are as follows: the concept of being with self, being in the world, encounters with entities in the world, spatiality, and each moment of care in the world. Researchers should acknowledge existence as being in the world; people are embedded and inseparable from the world. The way each person makes sense of the world, objects, and encounters is based on individual lived experiences. Correspondingly, participants in

this study each reached their own descriptors of being in the world as well as how they care about and make sense of their lived experiences interacting in the world.

The selection of IPA as a research design was deliberate to understand lived experiences of participants navigating socialization and support. Smith et al. (2009) described interpretive phenomenology as exploring persons' relatedness to, or involvement in, a particular event or process deemed a phenomenon. Through phenomenology, one obtains a grasp of the very nature of the *thing* or *experience* being explored (Van Manen, 1990). In this study, understanding the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization and support in postsecondary education is the thing—the topic of the research to be illuminated—that makes IPA the most appropriate research design.

In summary, IPA is the most appropriate research design for this study because of my need to explore, describe, interpret, and situate the means by which participants make sense of their lived experiences. The lived experiences of Black undergraduate men in higher education navigating socialization and support is a complex phenomenon that requires exploring through an IPA lens. The complexity of the phenomenon of socialization and support for Black men in this study points the need take into account contextual conditions, everyday situations, and their lived experiences when seeking an understanding through an interpretive phenomenological analysis and counter-storytelling autoethnographic approach.

Critical Counter-Storytelling and Autoethnography

Complementing the IPA design are counter-storytelling techniques (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000) in the form of autoethnographic narratives (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Ellis et. al, 2010) is needed for this study. The critical counter-storytelling and autoethnographic narratives develop a deeper understanding of the stories behind what the research purpose and questions are intended

to make visible. The integration of autoethnographic narratives allows for more traditional research threads like, interpretive phenomenology and focus groups, to work together with the stories that I have accrued through decades of *journeying while journaling* about my experience as a Black man at PWIs.

As documented in my journal over this period, bringing my lived experiences and feelings to the surface through autoethnographic writing has value. In this manner, writing becomes an additional form of data collection and analysis, as the process of writing serves as the site of inquiry into the self, which can be cross-referenced with stories found in journals. As I place words on the page, they develop into an additional layer of interpretation and analysis of collective stories and shared experiences between the men in this study and me, as researcher, to produce an interpretive phenomenological analysis with an autoethnographic counter-storytelling narrative.

According to Ellis et al. (2010), "autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (p. 1). Autoethnography challenges traditional ways of conducting research and representing participants (Adams & Hollman Jones, 2008). It merges autobiography and ethnography together, resulting in a combination of product and process for researchers (Ellis et al., 2010). By doing so, this method of qualitative research engages and immerses the researcher in a culture to better understand and interpret lived experiences of the participants studied.

As it relates to this critical phenomenological analysis, the autoethnographic approach centers our lived experiences as Black men navigating socialization and support at the forefront of the research to describe the phenomenon in its our own terms, which are nuanced culturally to

us as Black men. Our stories shared are intended to resonate with readers through individuality, personality, emotions, and feelings shared in our own terms and experiences. As Boylorn and Orbe (2014) said, "we write as an Other, and for an Other" (p. 15). Similarly, as a Black man, understand, I write as a Brother for my Brothers. It is through this autoethnographic research approach that I can *lift other brothers as I climb*.

Boylorn and Orbe (2014) emphasized the need to hear from diverse perspectives and make the stories that have long been invisible to the mainstream, visible to them. Accordingly, critical counter-storytelling technique provides a tool to counter-deficit storytelling (Solórzano and Yosso, 2000). Counter-storytelling in this study offers space to conduct and report research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of the undergraduate Black men of this study. As the participants and researcher describe their counter-storytelling narratives through an autoethnographic lens, the researcher composes in writing how to report their collective stories as strategies to disrupt deficit storytelling and work toward social justice and bringing voice to marginalized groups (Solórzano and Yosso, 2000).

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) articulated this in *Writing as Method of Inquiry*, and they frame this form of inquiry as CAP ethnographies (Creative Analytic Projects). In discussing these CAP ethnographies, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) outlined four standards: substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, and impact. The substantive contribution is demonstrated through my perspective and contributions to helping readers understand the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization and support at PWIs. Aesthetic merit is achieved by my integration of poetry, and demonstration of various modes of code switching throughout the dissertation that allow the reader to experience how I must engage in code-switching on a daily basis while navigating PWIs. Additionally, I aesthetically invoke my

personal voice as a leader in my effort to *lift other brothers up as a I climb,* because I am aware that I am speaking to Black men pursing the doctorate, and my ability to connect with them and help them find their voice, is inherently part of this process. Therefore, this dissertation carries a specific approach to aesthetics that allows for that to happen. Regarding reflexivity, I have provided reflexivity in the study through self-awareness and self-exposure by the methods of journaling, poetry, and counter-storytelling. As many autoethnographers require, there is an element of vulnerability to this work. Finally, I am confident that the research will stimulate readers emotionally and intellectually given my experience and emotions navigating the phenomenon of socialization and support at a PWI, which is seldom shared in academia.

In addition to the standards, Richardson and St Pierre (2005) discussed how the process of writing is a site of personal exploration, because the process of writing through the data we carry in our own experiences is an ongoing process of analysis. Therefore this process of analysis through writing personal stories and cross-referencing my journals, in a sense, becomes the added layer of rigor to go with the focus group interviews and the IPA components of this dissertation that feel more traditional to qualitative inquiry. Together, these methodological layers culminate to create and interpretive counter-storytelling approach to develop a deeper sociocultural understanding of the data collected from the participants and researcher during the focus group interviews.

Participant Selection for Focus Group Interviews

Participant selection is important to conducting an IPA of lived experiences. It is especially critical in my study as I research the complexity of socialization and support in the lived experiences of Black men at PWIs. A qualitative researcher must make certain that participants are accessible, have experience with the phenomenon under study, and are willing to

speak about their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Without willing participants, no topic can be fully explored. Therefore, finding potential participants with experiences navigating the phenomenon, socialization and support, who are willing to share their lived experiences at PWIs is critical to the research and findings of the study.

IPA research projects are usually conducted using small sample sizes. Given the time-consuming nature of this research, it is most effective with smaller sample sizes. Offering useful specifics, Smith and Osborn (2015) found that IPA researchers should have a sample of three participants, because this size allows for an in-depth engagement with each participant and a comprehensive examination of similarity and difference. Sample size in IPA is essential in exploring the lived experiences of people and the ensuing meaning-making of those lived experiences, because it is time exhaustive with each participant interviewed.

In an IPA study, participants must be selected with purpose and intention (Smith et al., 2009). The participants must have experienced a particular phenomenon. Purposeful sampling is an applicable approach to identify participants for this study. Creswell (2007) defined purposive sampling as purposefully informing an understanding of the research problem through participant selection. Participants in this study were selected purposefully with relation to their lived experiences at a PWI and navigating socialization and support as undergraduate Black men.

Patton (2002) discussed the unique factors to consider when developing a participant profile (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomic status, education). For the purposes of this study, the criteria used for participant selection were to identify as Black and male while being enrolled as an upperclassman (i.e., junior or senior) at a PWI. I selected to study participants who experienced life as an undergraduate at the college for at least 2–3 years (no transfer students). Following the development of criteria, the participants who were selected were three

undergraduate Black men who were upperclassmen at a PWI. The fourth participant in this study is the researcher.

The Fourth Participant: My Brothers' Keeper

The fourth participant of this study is yours truly, Quincy A. Bevely, *my brother's keeper*. As revealed throughout this study, I believe it is my calling to serve as an educator and *lift other brothers as I climb*. I take this calling very serious and consider it to be my life's purpose. For ten years I have *journeyed while journaling* through higher education at three predominantly White institutions while serving as an Apartment Area Coordinator, Director of Cultural Education, Assistant Dean of Students, Title VI Coordinator, Assistant Vice President for Institutional Diversity, and Adjunct Faculty member. In addition to my professional experiences, I *journeyed while journaling* as a Black undergraduate and graduate scholar. My objective of journaling was very simple – to create a space where I could authentically voice my lived experiences at PWI through deep-reflection, self-awareness, and writing. My journal entries offer stories about my experiences as both a Black undergraduate man and Black professional that cannot be found anywhere else since they are unique to me. My journals enrich the data collection by offering an autoethnographic thread for counter-storytelling to disrupt the dominant deficit-based narratives of Black men underachieving.

I am a firm believer in power sharing. This value guided my approach to this research study. I am conscious of my own positionality as a senior level administrator and the participants' roles as students. In full transparency, I explained to the participants that I am engaging with them as a researcher, not as they typically know me as an administrator. Further, I emphasized that our focus groups are not meant to be performative in anyway. I asked the participants to bring all of themselves as Black undergraduate men into this study. I welcomed

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the opportunity for the participants to express themselves honestly, openly, and bluntly. I also attempted to create space for participants to be vulnerable by establishing that our interviews were a judgement free zone.

The success of this study rested on previously established relationships and ongoing mentorship between me, as Black male administrator, and these participants. I sought to understand their lived experiences to better inform myself and other faculty, staff, and administrators that serve them in higher education. In this sense, this research has the potential to be transcendent in meeting the needs of undergraduate Black men navigating socialization and support to foster institutional change by analyzing the dialogue between the researched and researcher. The participants' and researcher relationships create a unique dynamic that yielded rich data that could not be achieved otherwise without their kinship and shared community at the PWI site.

Research Site

The research site for focus group interviews is described in a non-identifiable way to protect the confidentiality of the participants and institution being studied. The research site was a small, private liberal arts college in New England. To protect their identity, I assigned a pseudonym—School A—to the college. School A is a coed postsecondary educational institution that is located on a small campus; enrollment is approximately 5,000 students (the majority are undergraduates). The students on campus range from 1st-year to graduate academic status. A small demographic of middle-aged adults are enrolled in evening programs; few attend during the day. The college is intergenerational; however, the dominant age group on campus is 18 to 22 years old.

Due to safety concerns and the need for social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus group interviews were conducted via Zoom. However, the specific site where I interviewed and collected data was an office space in a central building on campus with which the participants were familiar, to provide a level of comfortability and familiarity online.

This site is very quiet and has private meeting spaces. I had direct access to this site. I deliberately selected a locked and closed room to conduct interviews for the purposes of anonymity for the participants. The office space was locked during the entire time of the interviews, and a sign that read "Please do not enter" was placed on the door to avoid any distractions, interruptions, or breach of confidentiality. The intentionality put into selecting this site was beneficial to conducting interviews with participants while also ensuring that data collected were protected from anyone outside of the study while the study was being conducted.

Data Collection Methods

Successful data collection techniques entail organization, flexibility, and sensitivity (Smith et al., 2009). I have kept a personal journal for over ten years since my days as an undergraduate as method of data collection. In addition, the interview portions of the data for this study were collected over a period of six weeks through three focus group interviews totaling four hours. While researchers often use one-on-one interviews to achieve the objectives of IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009), few IPA studies have used focus group discussions. Focus groups provide rich experiential data (Palmer et al., 2010). There is value in conducting focus group interviews and integrating focus group data into an IPA study (Palmer et al., 2010).

Focus Groups in Interpretive Phenomenology

Over the past two decades, focus group interviews have been administered in published IPA work (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Flowers et al., 2001). Researchers have recognized the need

for further examination of the compatibility of IPA with group gendered data (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, 2004). Correspondingly, this study examined race and gender-specific data as each relates to socialization and support in the participants' lived experiences at a PWI. In previous IPA studies using focus group data, research used facilitated group discussion as a data collection method (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Palmer et al., 2010). This approach of facilitated focus group discussion as a data collection method answered the research problem by gathering personal accounts of lived experiences that were gender specific.

Focus groups can be appealing to IPA researchers because this approach enables multiple voices to be heard during one interview, which draws a larger sample into a smaller number of data collection events (Palmer et al., 2010). Rather than reducing accounts of personal experience, the group dynamics in their focus group, added something extra to their analysis (Flower et al., 2001). This "something extra" would have otherwise been unexposed in their research without focus groups. Similarly, the focus group method in this study for collecting data provided something extra by enhancing data collection and analysis through the unique group dynamics in this study. Without focus groups, the research questions of this study could not be answered appropriately because of the necessity for descriptive and meaning-making accounts through group discussion.

In some situations, group discussions can elicit more experiential reflection than a one-on-one interview (Palmer et al., 2010). The use of focus groups provides observation and linguistic analysis to the identified research problem. Palmer et al. (2010) explained that the participants' personal accounts are likely to be shaped not only by the researcher's questions and reactions, but by the degree of shared experiences among participants and their sensitivity about the subject matter, which can only be achieved through a culturally responsive focus group

approach for qualitative inquiry. Being culturally responsive in this study means taking into consideration the influence that culture (race and gender in this study) has on the participants' lived experiences navigating socialization and support at a PWI. Integrating advancements in technology approaches was significant to creating a culture where the participants of this study felt they were safe and could be brave in sharing their lived experiences in virtual spaces to engage in the three-phase focus group interview process.

Three-Phase Focus Group Interview Process

I interacted with three undergraduate students in a three-phase focus group process, which included three focus group interviews. Earthy and Cornin (2008) noted that using multiple interviews offers benefits including trust and rapport between participants and the interviewer. Moreover, it is less exhausting for the researcher and participants than trying to capture a person's life story in a single attempt.

Through the three-phase focus group process, I developed trust and rapport with the student participants and captured the lived experiences they wanted to share without racing against time. The three-phase process was a good approach to alleviate any stress or concerns the participants had about capturing their entire lived experience in one facilitated group discussion. The participants understood that our facilitated group conversations continued beyond the first and second interviews, which encouraged the participants to take their time. As a result, this strategy enabled the participants to be as rich, thorough, and detailed as possible in response to the questions posed during all three phases of the facilitated focus group discussions.

Phase 1: Five-Finger Squeeze Focus Group Discussion

In Phase 1, my first focus group interview with student participants focused on their lived experiences as Black men at School A, a PWI. As important as the topic of the first interview

were the nuances of the environment. Hall (2020) noted that in an online focus group, it is good to establish ground rules right away for to establish respect and a community agreement during the conversation for participants. I met with each participant in an introductory meeting before conducting the facilitated focus group discussions to answer any of their questions. Once all of the participants confirmed participation by reading and signing the informed consent form (see Appendix A) and by affirming it verbally during the introductory meeting, I organized a participant meeting the day before the study commenced to discuss the study in a group format and familiarize them to a focus group online setting.

We began the first phase of focus group interviews, with a free fluid conversation of simply catching up to create an atmosphere that allowed them to speak freely in response to any questions asked, but not interrupt anyone while they are speaking. To be clear, they were not required to respond in any particular order. The interviews took place over three focus group discussions that were two weeks apart, for a total of six weeks. At each meeting, I recorded the focus group interviews using the Zoom recording feature, which was in plain sight of each participant and showed as "recording" on their computer screen. Steward and Shamdasani (2015) recommended giving online focus groups 12 to 15 questions considering the topic covered. I selected 15 interview questions, along with the five-finger squeeze icebreaker.

The five-finger squeeze served as an icebreaker and involved sharing the following as an introduction for each participant: (a) thumb, something you like about higher education; (b) pointer finger, something you look forward to in higher education; (c) middle finger, something you dislike about higher education; (d) ring finger, something you are committed to in higher education; and (e) pinky finger, a fun or interesting fact about your experience in higher education. Each participant introduced himself using this method.

The response from one of the participants, Levi, shows an example of the five-finger squeeze icebreaker.

Something I like about college is the social environment, where I get to meet so many different people from around the world that have different perspectives than me. Something I [looked] forward to since freshman year was building a network with professors because I was always told it's who you know, not what you know. I always look forward to that. Something I disliked, specifically, about the college was just a lot of times the lack of accountability from the institution. Ring finger, something I'm committed to, honestly is myself and my own education, furthering my own progress. And then, something interesting that I experience in college was, honestly, it goes back to the social life. Seeing how a lot of people—they live different from me. Seeing how a lot of people, they live different lifestyles, and learning from that.

After the introductions were completed, participants answered a series of questions over the next three interviews. (See Appendix B for the questions.)

Phase 2: Music Elicitation Interviews

In the second phase, beginning at Question 7, I invited students to play a song or share a spoken word that represented their campus experience. According to Dos Santos and Wagner (2018), music is an underexploited resource research, yet it can be used in innovative ways to benefit methodology. Music has related feelings, memories, and experiences (Keightley, 2009). Music elicitation serves as a route to participants' emotions and helps them open up to consider their attachments and investments with a phenomenon as it relates to the music (Dos Santos & Wagner, 2018). During Phase 2, music elicitation broke the ice and helped students delve deeper into their feelings and make meaning of them.

Phase 3: Final Facilitated Student Focus Group Discussion

For the final focus group interview with the participants, we opened our dialogue up with an activity called *Zoom in the Room*. Each participant was asked to take two minutes to find a photo or object that represented either their support or experience at School A. After they retrieved each of their items from the room, we discussed the object they selected. These objects were important to each participant. I used them as a tool to help them be more expressive in their narrative accounts of how these items represent their support or experience at the college.

To display the data collected during the three-phase focus group interview process, Table 1 presents an inventory data sources of this study: which include, the five-finger squeeze activity, music elicitation interview, zoom in the room activity, journaling, and other alternate sources of data. Below, Table 1 exhibits the amount of pages used to analyze the data, which was approximately 1,138 pages.

Table 1

Data Inventory and Raw Data Pages

Source of data	Description	Total no. of pages
Previous experiences working with students prior to study (autoethnographic thread)	A variety of experiences and documents collected over three years with the participants	Programming, retreats, town halls, fundraising, dinners, teaching and service learning opportunities
Researcher Journals	A writing collection of ten years	Ten years journaling = 1000 pages
I Am the Researcher Poem	Researcher's positionality described	Three pages of researcher thoughts
I Am – Participant Poems	Participants' introductions	Three pages of participant intros
Five Finger Squeeze	Participants' likes/dislikes at PWI	Ten pages of commonality/nuances
Music Elicitation Interview	Songs connected to PWI experience	Twenty pages of song lyrics
Zoom in the Room Activity	Items connected to PWI experience	Five pages of interviews
Four hours of focus group interviews (60 minute interview; 2 interviews 90 minutes each)	Three-Phase Focus Group Interview process with between participants and researcher	Eighty pages of interviews from three phases of the focus group interview process with participants
Meeting notes from interviews	Interview reflection notes	Seventeen pages of reflection notes
Total raw data pages		**Approximately 1,138 raw pages**

Technological Approaches and Advancements for Online Focus Groups

Innovate technological approaches and advancements for online focus groups were needed to collect rich data from the participants as marked in Table 1. Specifically, technological advancements in online communication have led to the emergence of online focus groups and culturally responsive approaches (Fielding et al., 2017). Online focus groups vastly extend the geographic possibilities of a study by providing access for participants who are in remote settings (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Technology and online focus groups were especially needed for this study, given the challenges of remote learning and access during COVID-19. Using an online format was essential to be socially distant while conducting focus groups.

Synchronous online focus groups were administered in this study. According to Hall (2020), synchronous online focus groups are similar to traditional focus group interviews as they are facilitated in real time, which gives them a comparable dynamic to a live discussion or traditional focus group interview. The number of participants in synchronous video-based online groups is smaller than face-to-face practices. Hall explained that this choice is for two reasons. First, it is more challenging for the researcher to keep track of all the participants when their faces cannot all be seen on the same screen together. Second, a large group is not recommended because the section of the screen displaying other participants can become crowded for those without large monitors, creating a disconnect in participant dialogue and observations during the interview.

To ensure the interview is culturally responsive for online focus groups, the researcher must decide on the type of platform most appropriate for the population being engaged. Hall (2020) recommended choosing a platform that participants may already be comfortable using in order to maximize the potential of online focus groups and produce rich detail and information.

For that reason, I selected the Zoom because students were already comfortable using it for classes, organizations, and other campus meetings.

Starting the online focus group discussions with inquiries that allow participants to introduce themselves encourages group cohesion (Hall, 2020). Considering this, I began each focus group interview with an icebreaker of some sort that inspired cohesion among the group. The online focus group environment is significant to the success of the interviews. Krueger and Casey (2015) noted that if the environment were appealing and easy to navigate, participants would have a more enjoyable experience, which leads to more interaction from the participants.

 I intentionally selected a world map as the background for my screen, to illustrate inclusivity and diversity, and to make the environment enjoyable and welcoming for participants. Moreover, I invited participants to personalize their screens and backgrounds. Along with changing their backgrounds to something personal to them, the participants changed their usernames on Zoom to their chosen pseudonyms for the study.

Keeping the layout and design simple during online Zoom focus groups can be more stimulating for participants (Krueger and Casey, 2015). During the interviews, I made certain that my desk and site were not cluttered and appeared to be clean at all times. I explained how to work the Zoom functions including the chat. I placed any instructions in the chat after I voiced them for clarity about the directions. I integrated this technique in all three phases of the focus group process for things like the five-finger squeeze, music elicitation interview, and Zoom in the room activity to collect rich data to later analyze and report in the findings of this study.

Data Analysis

Following the data collection, data analysis was significant to my interpretative process at the researcher. While writing through counter-storytelling and referencing back to my journal

was the primary form of data analysis for the autoethnographic threads of this dissertation (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Ellis et. al, 2010; Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000), the analysis of focus groups took on a more traditional approach to data analysis – even while they naturally overlapped throughout the process. Interpretive phenomenological studies do not recommend a single method of analysis for working with data (Palmer et al., 2010). Data analysis for IPA studies is unique compared to other qualitative inquiries because the researcher conducting the analysis does not try to fit research findings into existing theoretical frameworks (Finlay, 2009). Instead, in an IPA, researchers are concerned with thoroughly examining human lived experience as expressed in its own terms, rather than predefined categories (Smith et al., 2009).

The goal of data analysis in IPA studies is to understand the participant's point of view, and focus on personal meaning making in specific contexts (Smith et al., 2009). To understand participants' point of view and manage the meaning-making process, I did member checking. Member checking can offer a researcher corrections to the transcript or even further elaborations as an interpreter reflects on what was said (Brenner, 2006). Member checking is a practice for exploring the credibility of results. Data or results are shared with participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences as interpreted by the researcher (Brenner, 2006). Member checking is necessary to confirm that each participant's words are articulated accurately in the transcript, which is critical to analyzing the data collected.

The specific elements for analysis in an IPA study include a systematic process (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The first step of the process begins with a verbatim transcription of each interview and organizing the data for further analysis (Maxwell, 2005; Seidman, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). The second stage involves reading and listening to audio recordings of the interview

while making notes of anything of interest in the transcript for further exploration or interpretation.

The next step is a close line-by-line analysis of participants' words and meaning. In this study, similarities and differences in the dialogue were identified to generate codes that emerged from all participants (Maxwell, 2005; Seidman, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). The focus was to make sense of the participants' experience, understand their point of view, and focus on meaning making in particular contexts and brand them as codes. To identify the codes on the transcript, I conducted a line-by-line analysis of each focus group interview transcript. I reread the transcripts looking for observations or linguistic comments that I wrote, which stood out to me.

When I located words or phrases that awakened interest or responded to the research questions, I used colored sticky notes, labels, and pens and marker to draw similarities and distinctions between the codes. According to Saldaña (2013), codes are words or phrases from the language found in the qualitative data record. As I read the data of all three interviews, I pasted various colored sticky notes (yellow, purple, blue, green, etc.) on the printed interview transcript to highlight key moments, words, or phrases in each participant's responses. Table 2 is an example of this line-by-line analysis approach to identify the codes.

Table 2

Line-By-Line Analysis for Codes

Focus Group Interview 2	Code
1382–1389 Immanuel: Sure, schools are trying to do what they can to bring in more diversity and, bring in more students of color from different regions and different cities, but	Diversity
once they bring them to the school, what are they necessarily doing? I think the more I've gone through this school in particular,	Institutional betrayal
it's like I'm seeing just how hard it is for the programs that we love and cherish so much to provide for us what they provide for us.	Networks of support
It's so damn hard just to get something like funding, and you claim to be committed to it? If you're committed, then a financial commitment shouldn't be no sweat, honestly.	Institutional betrayal
Looking at things like the curriculum for example, like the combination of the philosophy and theology and English and History courses that we take for 2 years, there's been repeated calls for it to be revised so that it's not just only focusing on White history, and some teams and some professors are working on it, but we're still not learning as much Black history as we'd like to.	Curriculum
Even our diversity requirement,	Diversity
I'm a business student, so I was able to is finish with an Organizational Behavior class that doesn't really look at. It has nothing to do with Black studies, doesn't really delve much into Women and Gender studies, things of that nature. There's been loopholes, but I don't think they've gotten to the point where they're making a concerted effort for us doing it.	Curriculum
It's just kind of like you're at the PWI and realize this is how things are, so then you start to try to find a way to navigate it yourself or	Institutional betrayal
navigate it with your network of people around you, and sooner or later you realize that you're building yourself up for it.	Networks of support

Identifying Emergent and Superordinate Themes

The coding and observations helped identify patterns; these codes were as emergent themes by which ones had a relationship to the other. The next element of an IPA study is to develop themes that are identified based on each interview (Smith et al., 2009). No theme counting is done in IPA studies (Smith et al. 2009). To the contrary, themes should be organized chronologically (the order in which they came up) with an emphasis on convergence, divergence, commonality, and nuance. By identifying emergent themes and patterns, I began moving from the particulars to the shared themes in the analysis based on convergence, divergence, commonality, and nuance to create superordinate themes. In IPA studies, categories are referred to as superordinate themes because of the emphasis placed on identifying particulars and moving them to the shared themes, without theme counting (Smith et al., 2009).

Developing an Interpretive Account

The final step was to develop an interpretive account and report the findings using evidence-based narrative that included data excerpts to explain the superordinate themes. The evidence based narrative was based off of the researcher's interpretive account of convergence, divergence, commonality, and nuances that frame the relationship between subthemes and superordinate themes (Smith et al., 2009). Like the themes, the interpretive account was organized chronologically in the findings report.

Researchers move back and forth through a range of different ways of thinking about and interpretive, rather than completing steps one after the other as in a linear process (Smith et al., 2009). IPA empowers the researcher to focus on the sense of detail. There is a commitment to understanding how a phenomenon (an event, process, or relationship) has been understood from the perspective of unique people, in a specific context (Smith et al., 2009). I developed an eight-

step interpretive process for readers to visually see what I explained. This eight-step interpretive process for this research is based on recommendations from Smith et al. (2009). This is meant to allow readers to fully understand my analysis process, and my approach to using IPA to collect, analyze, and report qualitative research data.

1. Listen to audio recordings of the data.
2. Transcribe the data verbatim.
3. Read and reread.
   a. First, listen to the audio recording while reading.
   b. Next, read the transcripts without audio.
4. Conduct a line-by-line analysis of the focus group transcript to identify codes.
   a. The focus is to make sense of the participant's experience, point of view, and meaning making in particular contexts.
5. Identify emergent patterns, which are themes.
   a. No theme counting.
   b. Themes should be organized chronologically in the order they came up.
   c. Emphasize convergence, divergence, commonality, and nuance.
   d. Move themes from the particular to shared and from the descriptive to interpretative.
6. Craft themes into superordinate themes, specific to IPA research, because of the focus on the particulars.
   a. Search for connections between themes.
   b. Combine themes by charting or mapping how themes fit together.
   c. Structure superordinate themes to frame the relationships between subthemes.
7. Develop an interpretive account.
8. Report a full evidence-based narrative including data excerpts to provide justification for the findings.

The data analysis process for this IPA study was multilayered. It included data management, gathering information, reading, transcription, interpretation, classifying, and describing (Smith et al., 2009). The data were managed by maintaining a digital folder with each datum collected. It was organized with individual data from each focus group inside a folder that required password access to represent the data collected in each interview and participant.

Data Representation

The data representation comprised personal stories, coding, and thematic descriptions. IPA takes into account understanding the lived experiences of real people, openness to change,

input from participants, and ongoing interpretation by all contributors in data representation (Smith et al., 2009). The data representation characteristics of IPA are important because they outline the relationship between the participants and how they make sense of their experience. Data representation illustrates how interpretation can be systematically and covertly constructed in lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Data representation in this study included close line-by-line analysis of experiential claims, concerns, and understandings of participants. This line-by-line analysis is represented and shared through excerpts from transcriptions in Chapter Four. A dialogue between the researcher and the participants about what it means for participants to have experiences in the context of the phenomenon leads to the development of a more interpretive and representative account (Smith et al., 2009). Dialogue helped me as the researcher develop an interpretive account of what it meant for participants to have certain feelings and experiences (meaning-making). From there, I was able to develop a full narrative evidenced by a detailed commentary on data extracts of how the participants responded to each question. Lastly, through follow-up dialogue with the participants, I asked questions about things that I was unsure about to assure accurateness of the data being represented in my detailed commentary of the results and findings of the study.

Assurances of Confidentiality and Ethical Issues

Ethically, it is the responsibility of the researcher to assure reciprocity, confidentiality, and anonymity (Tracy, 2010). The participants' willingness to contribute to this research is instrumental to addressing the research problem and answering the research questions. Thus, the participants should mutually benefit from the study. Although I was unable to compensate the participants in monetary value, I demonstrated reciprocity in the form of *paying it forward* as I

mentioned in my story about my mentor and interest in *lifting other brothers as we climb*. I explained to participants how the research could possibly expose barriers to socialization and support for Black men at PWIs and might help other Black undergraduates avoid obstacles they had to overcome. I hope that through this conversation the students understood how priceless paying it forward is.

Confidentiality assures ethical responsibility. Confidentiality is important because participants may discuss sensitive and personal stories that cross their emotional boundaries. These sensitive and personal accounts disclosed in the facilitated group discussions may contain private information. To protect participants from harm and prevent the stories from identifying others outside of the focus groups, I asked each participant to choose a pseudonym. If a participant's real name was mentioned, I removed it and any other identifiable text from the transcript. Participants were informed verbally and in writing that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty and without being required to justify their decision to me.

Academic Rigor and Trustworthiness

Academic rigor and trustworthiness are imperative in evaluating a study's worth in qualitative research. According to Tracy (2010), establishing quality and trustworthy research requires the following eight criteria to be met by the researcher: a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence. To begin, the topic of the research to expose barriers in the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization and support is a worthy topic because it is relevant, timely, and significant to their undergraduate success in higher education. This IPA study is filled with rich rigor by using appropriate and complex theoretical constructs such as, CRT and IBT, to inform the data collection and analysis process. Sincerity of the study is characterized by the

researcher's subjective values, biases, and inclinations, which have been articulated in the subjectivity statement and researcher positionality poem.

According to Tracy (2010), credibility refers to how close the interpretation conforms to what the participants are attempting to say. I deliberately attempt to demonstrate to readers by quoting often verbatim the words of participants and then allowing my interpretive account to include participants' rich descriptions and reflections of experiencing the phenomenon found in the analysis to ensure credibility. Resonance refers to influence and affects the research has on readers (Tracy, 2010). Readers will find natural generalizations to other contexts or settings when reading about the lived experiences of these Black men navigating socialization and support. Significant contribution refers to the researcher providing noteworthy contributions methodologically, morally, and theoretically. By interviewing the participants over a 6-week period, I could check for consistency in what the participants are saying and connect their experiences and comments against the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches to make a significant contribution to existing literature.

Ethical criteria is the extent to which the researcher considers ethics related to biases, procedures, cultural specifics, and relational matters (Tracy, 2010). To achieve ethical responsibility, I incorporated prolonged engagement. In qualitative inquiry, prolonged engagement is applied in a study by spending sufficient time understanding the culture, social setting, and phenomenon (Tracy, 2010). Through prolonged engagement, I developed rapport and a sense of trust with participants over three years to facilitate an understanding and co-construction of meaning between the participants and myself. Finally, meaningful coherence refers to using methods and procedures that fit the stated goal. Participant narratives, counter-

storytelling, and journaling were interconnected to present the interpretations and report the findings of this study to achieve meaningful coherence.

Chapter Summary

Qualitative inquiry was identified as the methodological approach. After sharing my researcher positionality and how it situates me within the inquiry, IPA was discussed as the research design. Autoethnographic narratives were discussed as method to integrate counter-storytelling in the data collected. The research problem and questions were recalled to the reader's attention. I explained how and why purposeful sampling was implemented for participant selection. The research site was described, and the data collection, management, and analysis approach were each outlined. Assurances of confidentiality and potential ethical issues were recognized and were presented in the discussion of academic rigor and trustworthiness. The interpretation and analysis of the participants' unique lens and experiences yielded rich, in-depth insight into the phenomenon, socialization and support. This interpretation and analysis will help to fill the gap in the existing literature of the lived experiences of Black men in higher education, which will be discussed and reported as results in Chapter 4.

We now transition into the next chapter. It is my distinct pleasure to share my daily privilege of working with these talented, gifted, resilient, and educated Black men in higher education. There is a deep wisdom in the counter-story narratives that follow. I call upon the reader to listen with eloquence to the unique experiences navigating socialization and support at a PWI. My only hope is that you brace yourself and buckle up because this rollercoaster of higher education can get bumpy for Black men. Here's a look into our lived experiences as Black men at PWIs. Without further ado, I present to you my fellow brothers of this study… our future!

Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis and counter-storytelling study is to explore the critical dialogue among three Black undergraduate men at a PWI to expose barriers to socialization and support by considering their lived experiences. Integrated in this study is a qualitative research method to provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Black undergraduate men, with autoethnographic narratives and insights from the researcher as the fourth participant. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to socialization in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

2. Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to support in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

Chapter Four presents and discusses the data gathered from three focus group interviews and researcher journals. The findings emerged from analysis of the data. This data analysis was based on my interpretation of methods outlined by J. A. Smith et al. (2009) for data analysis of interpretative phenomenological studies. The major findings from this analysis, discussed below, include two superordinate themes: *lack of access for Black men* and a *hostile campus environment for Black men*; and six subthemes: lack of access to precollege preparation, lack of access to diverse faculty to address diverse needs, lack of access to institutional allyship, lack of inclusion, unescapable stereotypes, and pervasive campus racism. These themes aligned with a review of the literature regarding CRT and IBT.

The three participants and researcher contributed collectively during each phase of the research design, as I tried to see the knowledge as co-created in the study. Participants' words were transcribed verbatim from focus group interviews to value, acknowledge, and honor the

participants' lived experiences and the wisdom that comes from navigating socialization and support. The goal was to describe their perspectives, beliefs, and feelings precisely to preserve the integrity of the study.

Chapter Four includes brief introductions to and descriptions of each participant. The verbatim participant introductions provide a greater understanding into each participant's distinct perspectives. The verbatim data extracts from the interviews allows each of their voices and experiences to be recognized and respected as contributions to this research, as intended in phenomenological and counter-storytelling studies. Following the introductions, the emergent themes are outlined using excerpts from the various interview techniques in the three-phase focus group process to support the justification for each theme. Chapter Four begins with a research method inspired by and modeled through my own words in the poem *I Am the Researcher* in Chapter Three. The *I Am* poems offer an innovative method to introduce each participant in a way that captures their authenticity and truth in their own voice through the creative expression of their words. Each *I Am* poem demonstrates the unique intersections of their identities, which individualizes who the participants are. This self-expression is important to understand the perspectives they bring to higher education as Black men with complex individualities and stories, which are derived from their lived experiences navigating socialization and support at a PWI.

I Am

Who *I am* may not always be who the world or society perceives me to be. There are many stereotypes that are confused with knowing who Black men truly are. Due to media, society, and the news, Black men may even adopt subconscious beliefs about themselves. Black men can confuse who they are for what others, including the media and society, want them to be.

Further, the practice of code-switching complicates the identities of Black men. As highlighted in the detailed analysis, there are many impediments to inclusion, allyship, and honoring the individuality of Black men in higher education.

The *I Am* poems, however, offer the participants a space for sharing their stories in their own terms. Participants were able to recognize and share their unique individuality, while reading them as a researcher contributed to group cohesion and identified broader trends among the men. In my discussion with the participants, I asked them to (a) share a quote that was representative of them, (b) share in one or two paragraphs what was most important to them about their individual identity, and (c) complete the *I Am* poem in their own words, without code-switching.

The participants' words are copied verbatim in their quotes, introductions, and *I Am* poems. Their words comprise significant events of their lives, along with how they make meaning of these experiences. In the following section, each participant brings an exclusive lens to the study that contributes to the findings. Each participant was given the template in Figure 3 to complete their *I Am* poem.

Figure 3

"I Am" Poem Template

"I Am"
I am _____
 But I pretend to be _____
I am _____
 And I come from _____
My journey has been _____
 That's why I am who I am.
 I take great pride in _____
 But I wish I was _____
 For whatever reason, I have never _____
 I am aware of _____
 But I don't know much about _____
 I'm not like you, I am my own theory.
 I struggle with _____
 I cringe at _____
 I question _____
 I am not comfortable in _____
 I worry about _____
 I am affected by _____
 I am afraid of _____
 But I still wake up every morning
 Because I love _____
 I appreciate _____
 I value _____
 And I search for _____
 I am a product of my _____
 I am _____

Participant and Researcher Introductions

Participants are introduced in alphabetical order by their selected pseudonym. Following

the participant introductions, I introduce my own origins and describe the experiences that led

me to this research topic and study. In an IPA, the letters "I" and "P" of IPA are a joint product

of the researcher and researched (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). In other words, the researcher

interprets the phenomena of the participants to form an analysis of the study. In IPA studies, the

researcher is an interpreter, not an outsider. The researcher has experiences, values, and thoughts

that should be recognized and valued.

IPA involves integration of the researcher's perspective and experiences with the phenomena (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, it is significant to the findings of this study that I, as a Black man who is the researcher, interpreter, and fourth participant introduce myself to demonstrate how my perspectives, thoughts, and experiences contributed to the analysis and findings of the study.

The following participant introductions are intended to give descriptive information about each of the men engaged in this study. Each introduction, beginning with Alex, is meant to allow the reader to gain insight into the participant as an individual and undergraduate scholar. (See Figures 4–6.)

Alex's Introduction

"Good, better, best! Never let it rest, until your good is better, and your better is best." I really like that quote because I don't view it as me competing with others, but me competing with myself. I am not trying to stay complacent with my current situation by constantly striving to get the better and best version of myself.

Hi, my name is Alex. I am a 6′3″ African American man at a predominately White college. I am often stereotyped as a basketball player or an athlete at the school I attend as a result of my height and very lean frame. However, I do not let any of these things define me for who I am. I am not an individual whose sole purpose is to have my body and genetics used for the entertainment of others. Instead, I believe I'm an intelligent man whose purpose is to use their intellect for the sole purpose of benefiting society. Being at my institution left me as one of the very few computer science majors of color in the upcoming graduating Class of 2021. Till this day, I'm someone who wants to be recognized by the hard work and intelligence it took to get through this major, and the

sacrifices of my family that allowed me to get to where I am. Ultimately, I am thankful

for the people who surround me, my immigrant family who took sacrifices to get me to

where I am, and the ability to work hard that God gifted me with to get to where I am.

Figure 4

Alex's "I Am" Poem

I am an intelligent African-American man
But I pretend to be inferior to my peers
I am a hardworking man
And I come from an immigrant family
My journey has been rewarding
That's why I am who I am.
I take great pride in the things I work hard for
But I wish I was acknowledged more for the things I did
For whatever reason, I have never rewarded myself
I am aware of the people who support me through hard times
But I don't know much about my insecurities
I'm not like you, I am my own theory.
I struggle with maintaining strong relationships
I cringe at my past experiences
I question my future compared to that of my peers
I am not comfortable in situations where I'm the minority
I worry about my family long term
I am affected by my early childhood experiences
I am afraid of losing what I worked for
But I still wake up every morning
Because I love myself
I appreciate the things people do for me
I value the relationships I built
And I search for meaning
I am a product of my hard work
I am a strong African man

Immanuel's Introduction

I actually have two quotes. I couldn't really pick. One of them is a Bible verse. I usually

try to stick with it. And it was First Corinthians 15:10, "By the grace of God, I am what I

am, and His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they

all, yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me." The other one is, "Be more

concerned with your character than your reputation, your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are." I use that second one a lot, by staying true to who I am and not really caring about the opinions of others and doing things because I see them as fit.

Hi, everyone, my name is Immanuel. I'm currently a junior in college studying business, and I am more than [insert whatever label society wants to put to define me here]—so much more. I've always seen myself as an individual with no limits on what I can do and be. I stand on a mountain of sacrifices by my parents who immigrated here to the U.S. before I was born, but their sacrifices alone haven't been enough to get me to this point. I've fought through circumstances, through doubt, through negativity, and through setbacks all with an increasing drive to succeed. Coming from the inner city, the odds aren't always in our favor and it's hard to try to become something that you've never really had an example of around you for you to look up to. Despite the fact that statistics don't project us here, I'm still here! I count myself blessed to be in the position I'm in, but one thing I always tell myself is that "I didn't come to this far, to only come this far" and with God, I hope to continue to build foundations in the present, for better life for generations in the future. With all that said, it's been a pleasure to be a part of this process, I've learned a lot and soon you'll all learn a little more about me, and I hope for the day my (or our) experience as Black men, women, and people at PWIs no longer has a need to be the subject of studies. Until then, I'll continue to work hard towards the life that I've wanted and promised my family since I was a kid. That is one promise I fully intend to keep.

Figure 5

Immanuel's "I Am" Poem

I am a dreamer
And I pretend to be nothing that I'm not
I am more than meets the eye
And I come from the city where the Raiders play
My journey has been anything but easy
That why I am who I am.
I take great pride in the person I am
But I wish I was the hero some see
For whatever reason, I have never ran from a challenge
I am aware of the great tasks ahead of me
But I don't know much about what opposition I will face, nor do I care
I'm not like you, I am my own theory.
I struggle with my fear of failure
I cringe at the idea of coming up short
I question the inequality in this world
I am not comfortable in the privilege I've been afforded
I worry about the effects of my now on our future
I am affected by the same struggles as any man
I am afraid that I might not be enough
But I still wake up every morning
Because I love the person I'm becoming
I appreciate the life God has blessed me with
I value the people around me
And I search for the meaning in what I do
I am a product of honor and integrity, peace and power, truth and promise
I am a king.

Levi's Introduction

"As a man thinketh, so he is." I feel like that is something that I relate to a lot! I like to think of myself in certain positions and keep that positive energy out there. I envision myself in positions, so I can achieve it later on in the future.

Hello there, you will know me as Levi. I'm originally from New York and grew up in a four-sibling household. Fun fact is that I am an identical twin, which gave me a forever best friend. Being able to have a brother the same age and even the same face made our lives a hood version of *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody.* Growing up within the city definitely taught me ugly lessons, but it also made me into the man that I am today. I

realized at a young age that life was going to be hard no matter where I end up, but watching my mother raise four kids, conquer two jobs, and gain certifications gave me hope.

Living in New York was definitely fun; however, I knew by [age] 15 that I wanted a change of scenery and more, so I wanted to travel for a living. When senior year came, I was set on going away for college, despite my mother arguing for me to stay home since it would be way cheaper. Looking back on it now, I would have still made the same decision even if I knew about COVID. I am a big believer in not having regrets and living in the moment, for the moment. As a senior now, entering the COVID workforce, it is weird and unsettling, but I know that I will be just fine because I want success more than I want to breathe. My number one motivation has always been to prove everyone who has doubted me wrong, and God knows there is family on that list.

Figure 6

Levi's "I Am" Poem

I am Levi
But I pretend to be whoever I need to be
I am a young Afro-Latino king
And I come from a hood you ain't gon' go
My journey has been difficult but definitely worth it
That why I am who I am
I take great pride in staying true to my values
But I wish I was more goal orientated
For whatever reason, I have always cared, but acted otherwise
I am aware of my flaws
But I don't know much about fixing them
I'm not like you, I am my own theory.
I struggle with my identity within a system built against me
I cringe at hypocrites, racists, and bullies
I question unchecked authority
I am not comfortable in groups not geared to uplifting me
I worry about my family and future kids
I am affected by systemic racism but I'll be damned if it stops me
I am afraid of the country my kids will be growing up in
But I still wake up every morning
Because I love talking to people and making money
I appreciate my friends and everyone who have been on my side
I value love, friendship, loyalty, truth, education, and a great drink
And I search for happiness in the little things while seeing the bigger picture
I am a product of my environment, but am adaptive as fuck
I am who I choose to be so if you don't like, piss off kindly

My Introduction

"Tough times go away, tough people stay. Those who can must." This quote resonated
with me since studying abroad in Ghana, West Africa as a graduate student. I consider studying
in Ghana to be the most transformative experience in my academic journey. I heard this quote
used numerous times while studying, learning, and working in various Ghanaian villages and
communities. This quote brings back many humbling experiences and stories of perseverance I
witnessed firsthand. Observing some Ghanaian communities live without electricity, safe
drinking water, healthcare, and many other privileges I subconsciously took for granted as an
American, increased my appreciation and taught me to live in the moment with gratitude.

Aside from contributing to my graduate studies, this experience imparted a lifelong lesson to conquer problems with grace, dignity, community, and resolve, just as I watched so many Ghanaians demonstrate daily. Now, when faced with challenges, I look in the mirror, recite the quote to myself, and ask God to give me the strength to persevere through whatever trial or tribulation I may be facing. I am cognizant that someone is enduring a situation worse than mine, despite however great my burden might be. For that, I am forever blessed and gratified for the perils seen and unseen that my family and I never experienced.

As many of the participants described, my identity is embedded in a network of family support that includes love, nurture, and care. As alluded to in the introduction, my family and I are from the Englewood community, an urban low-income area on the Southside of Chicago. We moved to a northwest suburb on the outskirts of Chicago called Lombard following elementary school. This transition was a blessing for our family. It is one of the preeminent reasons for how I make sense of the world. The opportunity to live outside of the Southside, while still experiencing Englewood on weekends and over school breaks influenced my perspective and understanding of cultural differences. Our relocation to Lombard was arranged through my mother's pursuit and eligibility for a subsidized public housing program called Section 8. My mother's decision to move away from our Southside community and our extended family changed our lives drastically with regards to our sense of opportunity and outlook. Specifically, we no longer lived within the inequities and endangerment of the Southside of Chicago, even as we stayed true to our roots and embraced this change in environment, which increased our hope and access to more privilege in life.

Moving to a working-class suburb helped me discover opportunity and exposure to various lifestyles, many that were unobtainable to families living in Englewood. For example, I

was able to navigate two different realities daily in my Lombard community as I lived within the racialized and unequal worlds of American communities. My housing complex was a predominantly Black, low-income community in which I did not meet any adults of my race who had had the opportunity to receive a college degree. In contrast, there was a privileged, educated, and affluent White community just a few steps away filled with opportunities, wealth, and privilege. When I interacted with this White community, the most obvious and observable difference was race. The tangible disparities that racial oppression caused in wealth, education, and resources was evident in our dual realities living as neighbors.

I transitioned out of Lombard by later having the fortune to attend college. I experienced considerable academic challenges and social adjustment issues throughout my first semester of college. I struggled with coursework, felt like I did not belong, and had trouble navigating support on campus, which resulted in my placement on academic probation at the end of my first semester. I was a shell of myself and mortified to go back home for winter break. I felt embarrassed and humiliated. I sensed that I was letting everyone down in my family who invested in me because of my academic underachievement.

I soon became convinced I needed support and involvement to thrive in higher education. As I read my journal after my first semester of college, I saw that I was eager to join a student organization for support and to find a sense of belonging when I returned to campus. After exploring various options, I decided to attend a meeting hosted by a mentorship program, Black Male Initiative (BMI), which supported Black men in their pursuit of higher education at a predominantly White institution.

I listened anxiously as the president of BMI addressed educational barriers and issues that Black men face in higher education during the first meeting. From his remarks, I understood that

academic success and graduation rates of Black men were broader societal issues. I was not

alone. The president closed by politely asking everyone to take a close look at the person sitting

on each side of them (front, back, and side-to-side). He then stated that according to our

college's graduation rates, just 1 in every 5 Black men would graduate on time—that is, only one

of us in our small circles would graduate on time. I left the meeting feeling informed, but also

defeated and dejected. The road ahead at that moment seemed impossible to navigate. Certainly,

I did not have the vocabulary or understanding to describe how I was feeling about what was

supposed to be a motivational presentation for us Black men. Nevertheless, this was indeed a

deficit-based approach. I could feel how it was crushing to my spirit and confidence. Based on

these unsettling feelings, I decided not to pursue the organization any further. Yet, I continued to

experience every bit of trepidation and discomfort associated with the deficit-based approach the

president used as motivation. Now, with a stronger conceptual grounding of anti-deficit

approaches and counter-storytelling examples, I understand why the feelings of self-doubt

seeped into me as I wrote that journal entry.

Whether by fate or coincidence, at my graduation ceremony, I reflected on the BMI

president's remarks as I sat in my seat waiting for my name to be called. The president's voice

and his message kept playing repeatedly in my head. I discovered that of the five that were in my

small circle at that BMI meeting, I was indeed the only one who was graduating. I kept asking

myself, "why am I the only one?' My graduation ceremony became a bittersweet celebration; my

emotions of individual joy were mixed with guilt about the friends I left behind, who were

unable to share this life-changing celebration with me.

Of course, I was overjoyed to earn an undergraduate degree. Moreover, I was elated to be

the first in my family to graduate. But I was saddened that my closest friends from my first-year

of college could not share this accomplishment with me. I questioned whether I could have done something to help my friends persist to graduation.

At that moment, my life forever changed. I was overwhelmed with a sudden insight, a moment of clarity as I discovered what I consider the *aha moment* that led to my *calling*. Particularly, this *aha moment* led me to the work I wanted to do post-graduation: to improve the lived experiences of Black men in higher education through research and practice. I share this personal, delicate, and vulnerable moment with readers because it is a part of who *I Am*. It is a part of my research and lived experience at a PWI. I consider these moments foundational in my scholarship and important to the distinct lens, perspectives, and purpose that I bring to the analysis and findings of this study.

Findings of the Study

Analysis of the data and theme development yielded two superordinate themes that related to the research questions and the areas of focus within this IPA study. The two superordinate themes that emerged from the interpretative analysis of the transcribed interviews are *lack of access for Black men* and *a hostile campus environment for Black men*. Further, I found an additional set of subthemes. These two superordinate themes and six subthemes are:

1. Lack of access for Black men

    a. Lack of access to precollege preparation

    b. Lack of access to diverse faculty to address diverse needs

    c. Lack of access to institutional allyship

2. A hostile campus environment for Black men

    a. Lack of inclusion

    b. Unescapable stereotypes

   c. Pervasive campus racism

Evidence-Based and Counter-Storytelling Narrative of the Findings

   Through an in-depth analysis of the participants' focus group interviews and researcher journals, I have provided an evidence-based and counter-storytelling narrative to present the findings. The participants and researcher's experiences with the phenomenon, navigating socialization and support at a PWI, are highlighted using verbatim quotes, data excerpts, and journal reflections that are representative of the superordinate themes and subthemes that respond to the research questions of this study.

   The evidence-based and counter-storytelling narrative is recounted in chronological order as the themes emerged in the focus group interviews. This ensures that there is a focus on the particulars and there is no ranking or theme counting in the data analysis. After each section there is an interpretive account that focuses on convergence, divergence, commonality, and nuances among the participants' and researcher's experiences of navigating socialization and support. This technique was created to ensure that I was not an outsider but acting jointly with the participants to produce the analysis of this study.

   Background information is shared about each interview approach, which included the five-finger squeeze activity, the music elicitation interview, and the Zoom in the Room activity. Data excerpts of verbatim transcriptions are provided to support each of the themes and to honor the voice of each participant and the researcher. The combination of participants' voices and researcher journals are especially important to the findings of the study because they provide rich detail to the research questions that could not be achieved otherwise.

Five-Finger Squeeze Activity

The five-finger squeeze served as an icebreaker in the focus group interview and involved sharing the following as an introduction for each participant: (a) thumb, something you like about higher education; (b) pointer finger, something you look forward to in higher education; (c) middle finger, something you dislike about higher education; (d) ring finger, something you are committed to in higher education; and (e) pinky finger, a fun or interesting fact about your experience in higher education. Each participant introduced himself using this method. The summary of their five-finger squeeze responses can be found in Table 3, which is a visual display of convergence, divergence, commonality, and nuances among the participants' responses.

Table 3

Participants' Five-Finger Squeeze Responses

Name	Thumb: Something you like about higher education	Pointer finger: Something you look forward to in higher education	Middle finger: Something you dislike about higher education	Ring finger: Something you are committed to in higher education	Pinky finger: An interesting fact about your experience in higher education
Alex	The freedom from parents	Pursuing my interests in college and later getting compensated for it	The school fees—the cost of college forced me to have to work a lot and miss out on the college experience	Graduating from college and not being looked at as a failure in my family	The bond I was able to make between my classmates
Immanuel	The social aspect	My first-generation network	The lack of learning and an emphasis placed on exams	Maximizing my 4 years of college with social relationships, fun, and self-growth	The unexpected level of involvement in extracurricular activities
Levi	The social environment	Building a network with professors	The lack of accountability from institution	Myself and my own education, furthering my own progress	Seeing how a lot of people live different lifestyles and learning from that
Quincy	Hanging and socializing with my boys outside of class	Earning my Ph.D. and applying it to the work I do	The lack of Black faculty and administrators	Working to increase the success for Black students at PWIs	Meeting my wife and best friends in college

Interpretive Account of Five-Finger Squeeze Activity

Lack of Access to Institutional Allyship for Black Men

What stood out most to me in the participant's five-finger squeeze introductions was the commonality shared among the participants when using their ring fingers to describe their commitments in higher education. I heard the sincerity in their voices; there was intentionality and extreme commitment to bettering themselves without the help of others or institutional support. Similarly, I noticed this commitment in bettering myself without the help of others or

institutional support when describing my decision not to join the BMI program as previously mentioned in my *aha moment and calling* journal entry.

With the responsibility of attending an institution of higher education, there was an added pressure of not failing others from both the participants and me. In the focus group transcript, the participants described a fear of failure, letting others down, and measuring themselves against others. The participants' unified fear of failure brought back undergraduate memories for myself. As noted, I bore the same fear of seeing my family's faces and reactions after letting them down when I was placed on academic probation. The participants and I were both committed to bettering ourselves to uplift our communities, but fear of failure and letting others down was the impetus of our shared goal. The pressures of the community are bittersweet for Black men because we hold a burden of measuring ourselves against others, while also shedding light on the resiliency in our character to persist to graduation, often without institutional allyship and support. This was evident in an excerpt provided by Levi.

Something that struck me in high school and prepared me for college was W. E. B. Du Bois and his statement on the double consciousness. Like, we're looking at our lives through other people's eyes and we're measuring our world by someone else's tape measure. That's how I feel. I'm always, like what Immanuel said, I wake up and I see some of my White peers, I'm just like, "How the hell do you come in late from a night of drinking and then wake up, go take an exam, and you get an A?" I'm over here busting my ass at my desk nightly trying to get these good grades and stuff. I'm just like what is it that you got that I'm missing? Why can't I learn to stop that? Stop looking at other people's success and kind [of] take my own time with it? It's on my time, it's my life. Honestly, sometimes it be hard to just look at them, I be like, damn, it's so unfair to wake

up every day and realize I'm always one step behind, no matter if I try to be two steps ahead, I'm always one step behind and that's just frustrating.

After critically analyzing each participant's words in the transcript, I noticed the pressure of failure and measuring themselves against others. However, there was never a mention of institutional support or allyship to help prevent them from falling behind. This was similar to the experience I shared about not meeting my first mentor until my second semester of my senior year as an undergraduate. This problem of practice connected the findings and the superordinate theme: lack of access to institutional allyship to support our holistic development as undergraduates while at a PWI.

Socialization Benefits Black Undergraduate Men

Another commonality in the participant and researcher introductions were their openness to socialization opportunities. Explicitly, each of the participants' and researcher's fun facts (pinky finger) mentioned the excitement of being involved on campus, creating bonds, and engaging with others to learn from their differences and lifestyles. Individually and collectively, the participants and researcher placed a value on gaining knowledge through intercultural opportunities of diversity and quality friendships and relationships. Socialization encompasses attaining knowledge, skills, and abilities to become more effective and successful members of society following graduation. Uniquely, this may be achieved through all the interests that participants shared using their pinky finger in Table 3.

I discerned a pattern in our five-finger squeeze introductions of convergence around the social aspect, social environment, socializing, and freedom discussion in our likes about higher education. All of us used our thumb to characterize the social environment or socializing as part of something we liked about higher education, which represented why socialization is important

in the lived experiences of Black men at a PWI. But the participants and I diverged in our dislikes about our experiences in higher education, which demonstrates why the nuances of Black men must be taken into consideration to develop supportive strategies. We each reported something unique to us that presented challenges: the high cost of a college education, lack of culturally responsive pedagogy, the lack of institutional accountability, and the lack of Black faculty and administrators. Nuances were observed in their pointer fingers concerning the things they were looking forward to in higher education. Despite the convergence, divergence, commonality, and nuances all being present in the participants' five-finger squeeze activity, the music elicitation interview yielded convergence, commonality, and a small nuance in the findings. There was no divergence in the music interviews.

Music Elicitation Interview

Music elicitation interviews allow participants to express their feelings, memories, and emotions with a phenomenon as an innovative technique (Keightley, 2009). The music elicitation interviews advanced the data collection and analysis process by helping me interpret and understand the participants' feelings, emotions, and lived experiences as Black men in higher education through the artistry of music.

I was able to examine how each participant made meaning of their lived experiences at a PWI through song lyrics and the rich, detailed explanations they provided of why they chose a specific song and how it represents their experience at a PWI. I was in search of identifying convergence, divergence, commonality, and nuances—similar to the five-finger squeeze—but to my surprise, the participants and I had little divergence. The only subtle nuance was the difference in artist selection; however, the genre of hip-hop and subgenre of conscious music were shared by the participants and me in the study.

To provide autonomy for the participants to express themselves in the way they found most suitable, I asked them to come prepared with their choice of a song, novel, or spoken word piece that represented their experience at a PWI. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable with whatever form of artistry they chose. I was fully transparent that there would be no censorship or parameters around the content of their particular song, novel, or spoken word. In commonality, all three men selected a song to express themselves. An unexpected outcome of the music elicitation interview was the participants' connection to one another when the music began to play. I noticed them all singing along together, nodding their heads, closing their eyes, and supporting each other's choice of music.

A Hostile Campus Environment for Black Men

The participants all made sense of the music they selected and why it represented their experience at a PWI in a common way. In an excerpt from Immanuel's reflection of all the participants' song selections, he shared how the music related to the hostile environment Black men experience at School A:

> I just feel like everything's hard. One thing Alex pointed to was being at our institution has been an uphill battle and it's like Levi was saying, "it's that same narrative pointed to, not our shared experiences at our institution." But the music that we listen to, the music that we resonate with, and the art that we consume, the entertainment that we view, it always has to do with a Black struggle. It's kind of like, we know why, but when do we stop struggling? Like, when do we stop having to be two-faced? When do we stop having to code-switch? I've gotten to a point where for me personally, I don't think there'll ever be a 100% level of comfort in White spaces, but I'm at a point where it's like if you're

going to look at me as your golden Black child, then fine, I going to push your limits as

far as I think I can push them, while seeing where you let me push it to.

Lack of Diverse Faculty to Address Diverse Needs

The excerpt from Immanuel is hard to read but even harder to ignore. It demonstrates the

commonality among the group around their song selections, but it also demonstrates the agony

and anguish of never being able to be himself in a space of White dominance, which is the lived

reality for undergraduate Black men and calls for more diverse faculty to address diverse needs.

As Immanuel mentioned, when the group began discussing the songs, the commonality of Black

struggle was illuminating.

Immanuel's excerpt is a preview of the next section, which consists of verbatim

transcriptions from each of the men. I purposefully chose to include their verbatim transcriptions

in this particular form. I wanted to show the specific lyrics of the song that resonated with each

participant and connected with the emergent themes of the study to answer the research question.

Further, in each participant's transcription, the subtheme is identified in italics to connect with

how it creates a barrier to socialization and support. In the final summary of the three-phase

focus group findings, tables display how each subtheme relates to each superordinate theme and

answers the research questions. The participants and their song selections are presented in the

chronological order of their reflections during Focus Group Interview 2, beginning with Levi.

Levi's Song Selection: J. Cole, "1985"

My song that I chose, honestly, has been always in my head since it dropped our

freshman year and that was J. Cole's "1985" on his latest album. There's this one section

in the whole album where he kind of talks about, I'm just gone read it, but it says:

"These White kids love that you don't give a fuck/ 'cause that's exactly what's expected when your skin's Black./ They wanna see you dab, they wanna see you pop a pill,/ they wanna see you tatted from your face to your heels./ And somewhere deep down, fuck it, I gotta keep it real,/ they wanna be Black and think your song is how it feels."

Stereotypes. I remember vividly in my residence hall, I was singing with my roommate and we was in my boy's room—I'm not gonna say his name, but I was in his room and there was probably just five other White guys and I was looking around when I heard it and I was like, "damn, he wasn't lying, like, that's really how it is right now, at least in my social environment, in my residence hall."

Lack of Institutional Allyship. Throughout my college career, that's something I always look back to, like how some White people would say they down for the cause, but that's just honestly just to get in good with you and then, they'll be two-faced behind your back. I've seen it happen with stuff like this. So, honestly for me that, that resonates heavy in my heart. That's what it feels like to me, in my resident hall, a lot of them, they would offer me a lot but they would just do that just to be cool with me. *They're not an ally. They was never an ally to me*. I started to realize that, honestly, halfway through my freshman year. Seeing how some of the kids interact with each other, like, some of them would really be fake to each other's face and just play it off. I'll just sit there look, I'm like how can you do that? Like, how can you be this fake and just play it off like nothing. That did not sit right with me at all.

I feel like sometimes they just try too hard. They try too hard to be down. So another example, I went to this one party and I hopped on AUX [took control of the music] and some girl came up to me and she was like, "Who's on AUX? I don't like none

of this music." Honestly, I respected her more because she was keeping it a buck [telling the truth] rather than someone else who's just trying to be down or whatever or just trying to be cool. Other people, I'm just like you're trying too hard. Yeah, I know you trying to get out your comfort zone, but you're doing it in the wrong way.

Alex's Song Selection: Kendrick Lamar, "Alright"

A Hostile Campus Environment. The song I selected is "Alright" and he talks about the hard time he has in his life. All the trips that he had, how all of his homies are all fucked up but at the end of the day, they're all just gonna be alright. I related this to college and how just being here is kind of an uphill battle. You start from the bottom and then you kind of just have to work your way up, find ways to get money, find ways to get internships, find ways to ultimately achieve the goal that you came to college to accomplish. So, that's why I picked "Alright." He says, "If God got us, we gon' be alright." I mean, every day before I go to bed, I'm always praying. I'm always praying to God that He always has a plan for me, like, no matter what happens, I always pray that He's just by my side.

Immanuel's Song Selection: J. Cole, "Home for the Holidays"

A Hostile Campus Environment. I like both of those selections from Alex and Levi. My song is actually from J. Cole too. I think it's no surprise because he's a college student like you mentioned, but he went to St. John's, which is in the Big East so they're, they're just like us. In all honesty, they're very similar to us. The song was always going to come from either J. Cole, Wale, or Kendrick because I felt like they get deep down to it. But the song that I chose was J. Cole's "Home For The Holidays." So this was young J. Cole, back from *Friday Night Lights*, and that was honestly one of my favorite projects he ever

did. I chose it because it related. It wasn't necessarily about *this college and the struggles of being here, but like, at a PWI*. More about just going home from a PWI. To begin with, in the chorus he said, "Said I'll be home for the holidays,/ so when you see me, better holla at me./ I gotta get up out this before it try to *trap me*./ I gotta leave, I wish I could stay,/ but I'll be home for the holidays./ And to those that I used to know from way before,/ keep your head up. Come, let's get this bread up./ Girl, I gotta go, I wish I could stay,/ but I'm comin' home for the holidays."

Lack of Access to Precollege Preparation. For me, I always related it to while in college and my motto has always been, "I'm on campus so focus on what I'm doing on campus, but at the same time not forgetting, who I am away from college who I am outside of that, outside of those walls." When I'm home it's like, damn, something always seems different with somebody. You scroll down Instagram and their lives are just a lot different and then this feeling hits you … like, "*How the hell was I the one to end up at a school like this from a high school that I came from*?" And it's just like, that song right there resonated with me heavy. It always does, probably always will.

Quincy's Song Selection: Angie Stone, "Brotha"

Angie Stone named the song I chose "Brotha". The part that stands out to me most is: "He's misunderstood,/ some say that he's up to no good around the neighborhood./ But fo' your information – a lot of my brothers got education (now check it)./ You got ya Wall Street brotha,/ ya blue collar brotha,/ your down for whatever chillin on the corner brother,/ a talented brotha,/ and to everyone of yall behind bars, you know that Angie loves ya. Black Brotha, I love ya, I'll never try to hurt ya, I want ya, to know that, I'm here for you, forever true./ Black Brotha, strong brotha, There is no - one above

ya./ You mean so much to me, you give me what I need,/ I'm so proud of you./ I love you for stayin strong,/ you got it goin on,/ I'm so proud of you./ Going through thick and thin, brothas you gonna win./ I'm so proud of you./ Whenever you facin doubt, brothas gon work it out./ I'm so proud of you (I got my unshakable faith in you)"

I chose "Brotha" by Angie Stone because it represented my resiliency in college and the stereotypes and miss conceptions I had to overcome to succeed at a PWI. When Angie describes the different type of Black Brothas and her love for each of them, it makes me think about my boys that are successful, my boys that are talented artists trying to make it out the streets, my boys trapped in the hood with little direction, men in my family that are incarcerated, and close family and friends that I have lost to tragic gun violence in Chicago – rest easy, June, Big Ant, Kaylyn, and Suge – in love, I just dropped a tear on this keyboard typing as I think about the good memories and times we shared. Until we meet again…

As Angie says, despite their situations or circumstances, she loves her brothers. She recognizes the road they had to travel to get to where they are in life wasn't always fair. I am so proud of my bothers just like Angie. Going through thick and thin, brothers that embark on the journey and persist to graduation at PWIs, we're going to win! We will continue to make a difference while leaving a trail for future Brothers to follow. Further, I will continue to *lift my brothers as I climb*. As we know, difficult roads often lead to beautiful destinations. As Angie eloquently captured in her lyrics, cadence, and video, we will always work it out – I got unshakeable faith in us, too, my Black brothers.

Interpretive Account of Music Elicitation Findings

The hardest but most relatable moment of all the focus group interviews was the music elicitation interview and findings. In my researcher positionality poem in Chapter 3, I wrote, "Of

course, I want to grab him and say, 'Wow, I experienced that same damn thing.' However, this may seem partial or maybe even awkward for this young king." Specifically, I was referring to hearing, feeling, and sharing the participants' sentiments and emotions with them during the music elicitation interview. I connected deeply to their feelings and understanding of the thought-provoking lyrics. I empathized with each of them about the struggles they faced daily at a PWI because I experienced comparable challenges navigating socialization and support in a hostile campus environment with a lack of institutional allyship.

To be clear, I remained poised as the researcher during this exercise; but candidly, it was extremely difficult for me not to want to unpack every word in their lyrics recited or the words that followed in that moment. We all knew the struggles the artists spoke to were pervasive at a PWI, and we could do nothing but endure these challenges and resiliently fight to find our sense of belonging as individuals and as members of the Black community. The convergence of the participants' experiences was how they described their individual lived experiences and struggles in their hostile environment campus environment that included stereotypes and lack of institutional allyship. The convergence of these subthemes supported the superordinate themes, including lack of access and a hostile campus environment for Black men.

Levi mentioned that the lyrics demonstrated the stereotypes associated with Black men (e.g., dabbing, popping pills, tattoos) as well as feeling betrayed and a lack of institutional allyship. Levi's White peers in his residence hall violated his trust when Levi observed them using "the N-word" as they were reciting lyrics in his presence. Further, Levi shared an example of a more preferable way to connect with his peers. He found it more genuine when the female student was honest that it was not her desired choice of the music. Levi viewed her honesty about his music selection as an authentic approach and "not trying to be down." Authenticity is what

Levi characterized as institutional allyship to create more opportunities for support at PWIs through my interpretation.

In Alex's song selection, he discussed how Black men must always fight an uphill battle at PWIs to gain access to internships and financial support. Alex explained that finding strategies to achieve goals as Black men was a daunting task, which spoke to the barriers to both socialization and support he must navigate at School A. He shared how his friends, specifically those who identify as Black, are all facing the same challenges with the lack of access in their hostile campus environments.

Immanuel described emotions of feeling trapped at a PWI and eagerness to return home over break – a place where he could be free in his identity. Immanuel expressed the same guilt I spoke about during my undergraduate ceremony: explicitly, the feeling of mixed emotions about achieving success while members of your home community are stuck in the same position and fighting relentlessly to get out. Immanuel discussed the challenges of acclimating to a PWI, while maintaining his own identity and cultural values. The PWI is described collectively by the participants as being riddled with unescapable stereotypes and hostility from community members. These stereotypes and the hostile environment present barriers to socialization. The music elicitation interview exposed various barriers that prevent socialization; similarly, the Zoom-in-the-room activity exposed additional barriers that prevent support.

Zoom-in-the-Room Activity

The Zoom-in-the-room activity created a space that was natural and organic for our final focus group interview. The directions for the activity were to spend two minutes to find something in the room—it could be anything—that represented the support the participants received or their lived experiences at School A. Once the item was found, the men were asked to

return to the focus group and explain their selection. I elected not to share this activity with the participants ahead of time. Unlike the music elicitation interviews, this prompt was not meant to be structured; instead, the intention was to organically identify, through free and fluid conversation, how the participants perceived support and their lived experiences at a PWI.

After the participants gathered their items, they returned to Zoom and began to openly discuss the items they had selected. These items had significant meaning to each participant despite the divergence in their selections. There were nuanced differences in their expressions of support; two of the participants found their support in an object, while the third participant found support in a friend whose photo he shared. The commonality in their narrative accounts was how they navigated barriers to support at a PWI by surrounding themselves with positive relationships, which included family and close friends from similar affinity groups. The participants' selections were consistent with one of the findings of this study: that the *lack of institutional allyship for Black men* formed a barrier to navigating support at School A.

The next section is presented in chronological order. The text is again taken verbatim from the interview transcription to capture with accuracy how the participants navigated support and describe their lived experiences at a PWI. Alex began by discussing his AirPods and their meaning for his experience at School A.

Alex's AirPods

> These are my AirPods and I use them as a double meaning. One, I just like stay in my lane. Because usually when people have on headphones, they're very concentrated. People have on headphones when they're working out, when they walk in a place, and they just use it as a way to just stay focused on yourself. Even though there's a lot of outside factors that may be contributing to you wanting to go off your path, you just have

to just stay on your own path. Because at the end of the day, the main reason that you

came to college is so you can make yourself successful. When you're in college, you're

only responsible for yourself. And, I also think the second meaning for the AirPods is I

pick and choose what I want to listen to, right? So, I can either listen to all the positive

energy that surrounds me throughout college or I could choose to listen to something I

don't like. Then, the way you change the song when you listening to something if you

don't like, you can change people who you listen to, when you hear people that you don't

like.

Figure 7 is an image of Alex's AirPods that hold a double meaning for him: (a) to stay

focused and in his own lane, and (b) to avoid listening to people he does not like.

Figure 7

Alex's © AirPods

Immanuel's Planner

I was looking back and forth. I had my journal, and then my planner. They're one and the same, but I chose the planner, this specific planner. I'm obviously a person of routine, I'm not afraid to like switch that up if need be. But like, I've been getting this brand of planner since some time in high school, because I really liked the fact that it has the customizable cover so I could put whatever it is that's important to me or motivating me at that point of time on it. So, my little sister, she'd gotten into doing little word drawings and stuff like that, she made this little piece with my name on it. Having that one drawing, it made her happy when she gave it to me and I was like, "Yeah, I'm going to put it in my planner this year." Then, two, it keeps you grounded when you see that. On the inside of it, in the inside pocket is my older sister's senior grad photo. She went to Brown and graduated class of 2020. And then, my grandma who passed [in] my sophomore year in high school. So, just a couple of things that keep me grounded.

Figure 8 is an image of Immanuel's planner. To protect any breach of confidentiality, I blurred the identifiable features on the planner.

Figure 8

Immanuel's Planner

Levi's Best Friend

 I got a photo, a little Polaroid. I don't know if you all can see this. But that's me and my

best friend. It says Spring Retreat 2019. This is our last retreat together. Honestly, Bill

and me became roommates just by coincidence. It just happened freshman year. He's

always been a support to me since freshman year. He's like my brother. And yeah, our

last spring retreat it was kind of sad, because I was like, "Damn, I didn't know then that

was going to be our last one because of COVID." It makes it even all the more

memorable. The whole day was kind of just paying tribute to our friendship and stuff like

that.

Figure 9 is a photo of Levi and his best friend at their last retreat before the COVID-19 pandemic led to the loss of many activities. The photo has been modified to remove identifiable features and avoid any breach of confidentiality.

Figure 9

Levi and His Best Friend

Quincy's Wife

The object that represents the support I receive was found in a note from my wife that read, "Quincy you are an amazing husband, father, and child of God. As you embark on this journey of fatherhood, please remember that you are sooo loved – Your Roscoe." The posted note means so much to me emotionally and inspirationally because my wife and I are embarking on a new journey to become parents to a baby girl named Braelynn. Further, my wife has been my constant support and resource of love as I have moved through academia and my professional career at PWIs. Notes like the one placed on my book inspire me, but it is her – my wife – that has been by my side every step of the way through the highs and lows to help me

succeed since I was a student at NIU. It is like the old saying goes, "behind every strong man is a strong woman." Well, there is no way I could *lift other brothers as I climb*, if she wasn't *uplifting me as I climb*. To that point, there is no way, I would be where I am today without her. Figure 10 is a picture of the supportive note from my wife – my Roscoe.

Figure 10

Quincy's Supportive Note from his Wife
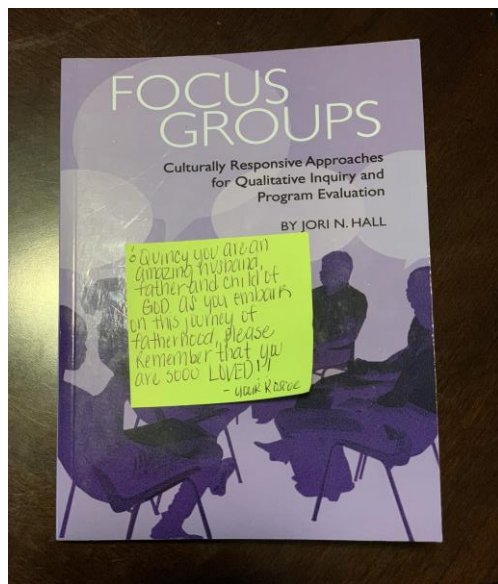
Interpretive Account of Zoom-in-the-Room Findings

In my interpretive account of the Zoom-in-the-room findings, I found that 3 out of the 4 participants, which includes me, I identified someone close to them as support. The persons identified as support in college were family or friends, which pointed to a convergence of the data demonstrating the importance of close relationships for the success of Black men. However, an apparent commonality of the group was that none of the participants identified a professional source of allyship on campus as support. This commonality was consistent with one of the superordinate themes of this study, the lack of allyship. The participants grappled with the idea of support at the institutional level because they each found it only in their peers—something I

can relate to from my experiences as well. Specifically, support was provided by those who shared the same identity or affinity spaces, which points to my journal entry about attaining my first mentorship relationship at the end of my senior year of college.

Due to the lack of allyship, the participants described constantly code-switching, being performative around their White peers, and being uncomfortable, which prevents support and intercultural peer-to-peer opportunities. The next data extract from Alex offers a valuable insight into the participants' lived reality of code-switching and the challenges it presents to navigating support at a PWI:

Something that I noticed both Levi and Immanuel said, it's how we have to live double lives and the whole code-switching thing. I think that's something that definitely really relates to what I have to go through on a daily basis. For example, being an RA and then hanging out with my friends, I can't just naturally be myself and that's because of the environment we grew up in. I feel like as a White student you can be yourself while you're employed and also while you're with your friends, because that's what's culturally accepted in the workplace. Whereas, me being myself as a Black man and then acting as myself in the workplace, that's not really something that's culturally accepted. You know what I mean? I feel like a Black type of slang, not even, like, saying the N-word at work, just, like, Black slang, isn't culturally accepted, but White slang is, and I think that's something that's really important that ties back to the conversation that we had of the double life that we have to live.

Participants did not have divergent thoughts regarding code-switching. They all agreed that code-switching caused a lack of institutional allyship and inclusion, which were both subthemes that emerged in the data analysis. The various stories and experiences of the

participants finding support converged in their personal narratives and accounts in their peer-to-peer affinity groups and friendships. A commonality was shared among the participants in their belief that maintaining their Black identity in White spaces was invaluable to them, individually and collectively. The overuse of peer-to-peer support in affinity groups pointed to the need for more diverse faculty to address their diverse needs in higher education and help Black men navigate support. Because of the lack of diversity among faculty and staff, serving as support for underclassmen for these men, while maintaining their academic status, placed a heavy burden of emotional fatigue on them, as they became upper-class students.

In the next section, the three-phase focus group interview findings discuss the need for increased racial diversity to increase socialization and support, among many other things. The findings of the three-phase focus group process and corresponding journal entries transitions the themes from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to interpretative, which help to demonstrate the two superordinate themes and six subtheme findings of this study.

Focus Group Findings and Corresponding Journal Entries

The findings discussed in this section include the data collected and analyzed in the study from the focus group interviews and researcher journals that responded to the research questions. The merging of the participant's thoughts via interviews, along with the weaving of my journal entries help to create an evidence-based summary of the particular finding that precedes each table. A table then follows each summary to identify where the findings are reflected in the participants' verbatim transcription. This section begins by addressing the first research question:

RQ1: Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to socialization in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

The superordinate theme, lack of institutional access for Black men, was distinguished as a result by the participants' recurring expressions of the following subthemes: lack of access to precollege preparation, lack of access to diverse faculty to address diverse needs, and lack of institutional allyship. In Table 4, the participants discuss a lack of institutional access for Black men—specifically, how their families' educational backgrounds, first-generation status, and underserved high schools contributed to a lack of access to precollege preparation. As a result, the men felt one-step behind when entering college, similar to what I described as my undergraduate experience as a first-generation college student in the introduction. The issues and internal perceptions of being one-step behind because of lack of access to precollege preparation are barriers to the socialization of Black men at a PWI because they enter college without the resources and structure to increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities when compared to their White peers.

Table 4

Lack of Access to Precollege Preparation

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
Lack of access for Black men	Precollege preparation	309–312. I don't have family that ever majored in business. So this was all very, very new for me. I didn't even have business courses in high school to even be exposed to some of the things that I would see in college.
	Precollege preparation	329–332. I don't know too many first-gen White business majors, but I know a whole lot of first-gen students of color that are business majors and other majors as well. So, everything that we're learning for the first time and is stuff that they had been exposed to at an earlier age.
	Precollege preparation	437–440. Like access to certain materials in high school. I had kids in my class saying, "Yeah, I took this course in high school and stuff." I'm just looking at them like, "Bro, I had broken textbooks in high school. So what are you talking about? You took this thing in high school?"
	Precollege preparation	1061. How the hell was I the one to end up at a school like this from a high school that I came from?
	Precollege preparation	1098–1101. Honestly, sometimes it be hard to just look at them, I be like, damn, it's so unfair to wake up every day and realize, I'm always one step behind, no matter if I try to be two steps ahead, I'm always one step behind and that's just frustrating.

Throughout the data collection process, each of the participants talked about an intense need for an increase in diversity on campus, again similar to my experiences of having no Black men as mentors in my undergraduate experience, a reality which has continued in my professional career at PWIs. Among the many reasons put forth, the students and I yearned to see a positive reflection of ourselves as Black men in professional roles and positions of authority on campus. The men expressed self-doubt by asking questions like, "What are we lacking?"

The participants were extremely heartbroken and frustrated by the institution not living up to its promise to provide more diversity. The sense in the interviews was that the time is now

for more diverse faculty to address diverse needs. Black men do not see their identity and communities represented instructionally. Table 5 addresses these concerns, worries, and limitations of diverse faculty to address diverse needs that prevent opportunities for socialization for Black men to engage in a more diverse curriculum, network with mentors of color for knowledge building, and build self-efficacy.

Table 5

Lack of Access to Diverse Faculty to Address Diverse Needs

Subordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
Lack of access for Black men	Lack of diverse faculty to address diverse needs	435–437. I don't see a lot of people that look like me in positions of success. So, it's kind of like, what are we, like, I always think about what are we all lacking?
	Lack of diverse faculty to address diverse needs	1583–1585. The things they could is more diverse hiring. It's not just seeing them on campus as your counterparts, but seeing them as your higher ups, seeing them in positions of authority, more than we have right now.
	Lack of diverse faculty to address diverse needs	2369–2376. I'm going to say it straight up, it just needs to be more diversified! And not even in the sense of the student body, but faculty and staff. The only diverse place is the custodial staff and that's fucked up. That's all I'm going to say about that. That's so messed up.
	Lack of diverse faculty to address diverse needs	2416–2421. We say it over and over again, to the point where it feels like either you're not hearing us, or they all just don't give enough of a fuck to try to really diversify staff. Especially, being a school that's not diverse. Okay, let's do it a random department, English department. Fine, you're not going to tell me that there aren't enough Black graduates that graduated with an English degree that you can hire from in your hiring process? Can't tell me that because they're Black English professors at HBCUs.

Subordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
	Lack of diverse faculty to address diverse needs	2470–2476. We're at a campus where the basketball team is predominantly Black, and has been for years on years on years, and we're currently in the tenure of the first Black coach to ever coach our men's basketball team, and he hasn't even been here for a decade yet. That speaks volume to me. If you haven't had hired a Black coach in this culture with predominantly Black players on your basketball team, and not to say that White coaches that were here didn't do good things, but your first Black coach is in the 21st century and you just hired him, what faith do I have that you're actually doing what you need to do and making an effort to hire more faculty and staff of color on campus?

Lack of access to institutional allyship for the men and me was the final subtheme of this study that responds to the first research question. In relation to the participants' lived experiences and the stories told throughout the study, navigating socialization and lack of institutional allyship presented barriers for us to freely express our Black identity, culture, vernacular, and native language, and find group membership. Socialization occurs in stages over a student's college experience. Socialization has both individual (cognitive) and organizational (interpersonal) dimensions that contribute to the knowledge, skills, and abilities of students. The intersections of race and gender influence socialization. Without institutional allyship, interpersonal development cannot be achieved. The lack of institutional allyship demonstrated to the participants that School A was not committed to advocating for them or enhancing their lived experiences. Table 6 shows the scope of what the men shared during the focus group interviews.

Table 6

Lack of Access to Institutional Allyship for Black Men

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
Lack of access for Black men	Lack of institutional allyship	831–838. They're not an ally. They was never an ally to me, I started to realize that, honestly, halfway through my freshman year. Seeing how some of the kids interact with each other, like, some of them would really be fake to each other's face and just play it off. I'll just sit there, look, I'm like how can you do that? Like, how can you be this fake and just play it off like nothing. That did not sit right with me at all.
	Lack of institutional allyship	1382–1390. Sure, schools are tryna do what they can to bring in more diversity and bring in more students of color from different regions and different cities, but once they bring them to the school, what are they necessarily doing? I think the more I've gone through this school in particular, I'm seeing how hard it is for the programs that we love and cherish so much to provide for us what they provide for us. It's so damn hard just to get something like funding, and you claim to be committed to it? If you're committed, then a financial commitment shouldn't be no sweat, honestly.
	Lack of institutional allyship	1681–1687. It's gonna be hard. It's not easy being at a PWI, especially not this PWI and we could only say especially because this is the only one we've known from our college experience, but it's gonna be tough. Teachers are gonna be annoying, admins are gonna be annoying, White students are going to be annoying.
	Lack of institutional allyship	2060–2061. I didn't feel as if the college had my best interests at heart, or honestly, I try to advocate for my best interest.
	Lack of institutional allyship	2170–2175. So, do I trust the college wholly? Not necessarily. Do I trust myself to act correctly? And to have my own best interests at heart? Most definitely. Do I trust them to do what's in the best interest of the school and their image and their values that recruit and bring students on? For sure. Do I trust them to do what's in the best interest of preserving alumni donations? And the public image? Yeah, because that's what they do time and time again.

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
	Lack of institutional allyship	2221–2224. The trust I have is full confidence that they will do anything to protect their image, like they've been doing, because that's just the nature of how they do things. But, do I necessarily trust them to take care of me? No.

It was evident through the participant interviews and the findings that the barriers to navigating support were fueled by a hostile campus environment toward Black men. The men spoke of a hostile environment consisting of a lack of inclusion of Black men. The participants provided descriptive accounts of the hostility they experienced that forced them to feel excluded and like they were just token numbers to improve diversity. These lived experiences endured by the participants forced them to question if they belonged at the institution. Further, it created a culture of always needing to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, as I described in journal entries woven in this study as always being the only Black man in the room.

Next, Table 7 answers the second research question by providing a verbatim transcription of what the participants deem to be barriers for Black men to navigate support at a PWI.

RQ2: Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to support in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

Table 7

A Hostile Environment Consisting of a Lack of Inclusion of Black Men

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
Hostile environment for Black men	Lack of inclusion	263–265. It really feels like I'm just there to show a number on a website. Like, oh, we're this diverse so-and-so. But it's not really like that. I don't really feel like I'm supported as much.
	Lack of inclusion	375–377. I would say the college thinks we're here, but are we really there? And basically what I mean by that is, yeah, we might be a student at the college, but are we truly incorporated with the college?
	Lack of inclusion	1433–1435. We gotta be comfortable being uncomfortable but it's never vice versa. White people never have to be uncomfortable. It's always us. We have to be uncomfortable in order to succeed in a White workforce and for me, that's frustrating.
	Lack of inclusion	1520–1521. I'm here, but it always feel like I don't belong here, how certain people just look at me and it's something I wish they can improve and change.
	Lack of inclusion	1548–1550. Something I think the college could prepare us more for is being able to be ourselves in environments where we're a minority.
	Lack of inclusion	2095–2097. They continually fail students of color, over and over again, when their emails, their messages, their advertising, and all that doesn't incorporate everyone that makes up the student body.
	Lack of inclusion	2227–2232. Whenever you see a person of color die at the hands of law enforcement, being that we can just look down at our skin, it cuts deep just from that, we may not have any other thing in common with them, except the fact that we're people of color. And it begs the question, am I next? And what happens if I'm next? And I couldn't help but think over the summer, like, "If that would have happened to me? Does the whole college community go up in arms? Or is it just my people of color."
	Lack of inclusion	2319–2322. I don't feel comfortable on campus because I just feel like there's nothing for me on campus. That's why I like being off campus and in the house is a blessing.

Due to their intersecting identities of being both Black and a man, the participants in this study perceived many unescapable stereotypes based on their success, abilities, dress, passions, and skills. Relative to the preconceived beliefs and expectations of others, the participants had to spend more time attempting to break or avoid perpetuating certain stereotypes than navigating support on campus, which caused a barrier. The participants desired to be perceived as smart, competent, and equal by their peers, professors, and staff but felt as though they needed to prove that they were qualified to be in certain spaces, perform certain tasks, and be considered for leadership opportunities.

The participants felt they had to hold themselves to higher standards by breaking perceived stereotypes for Black men. This included needing to work twice as hard as everyone else, tempering their speech, and downplaying their accomplishments. These reactions exposed barriers in the college's ability to make them feel safe and provide supportive structures for them to be successful. This was described in my researcher journal shared of feeling like I can't make a mistake because of the fear of perpetuating stereotypes. Despite these challenges, the men and I did not feel the need to subscribe to the dominant culture's definition of who a Black man is and can be which relies heavily on our resiliency and self-efficacy. Table 8 provides data demonstrating the resiliency of these men in succeeding in a hostile environment that stereotypes Black men.

Table 8

A Hostile Environment That Stereotypes Black Men

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
Hostile environment for Black men	Unescapable stereotype: Black men are cheaters	651–655. To break the stereotype that they might have of an African American man who just doesn't take college seriously or an African American man who's probably only performing well on exams because he's cheating, I try to interact with them to show them like, "Hey, although this African American man dresses in a certain way, or wears certain things, that doesn't necessarily mean he doesn't take class seriously." It just might be something that's cultural or his style.
	Unescapable stereotype: Black men are lazy	667–668. I just feel like there's some inevitable stereotype that comes with me that, "Hey, this kid might be one of those lazy Black kids who are just like dumb."
	Unescapable stereotype: Black men don't dress the part	1134–1138. I don't dress the best to class, sometimes, I'll go to class in a do-rag and I have to put five more steps forward than other students because of the fact they might have unfair misconceptions about me. That's something that's really affected me throughout college.
	Unescapable stereotype: Black men are aggressive	1160–1164. When I'm first meeting White people, I don't want to put them off, like, "Oh, this man sounds too aggressive." The way I speak sometimes might be off-putting, but that's not what I intend to be. That's just how I speak. I've seen some people feel uncomfortable when I genuinely talk the way I talk, and I don't filter my speech. I always got to be conscious about what I'm saying and who I'm saying it to and what parts of me I want to share.
	Unescapable stereotype: Black men are incapable and only hired to fill quotas	1735–1741. I had one of my White colleagues get a good amount of internships while I've been here so, when I would share my successes with him, he would be like, "Well, you know, there's not a lot of Black people in software engineering. You don't think you're just getting these internships just because you're Black and because they just need to fill a quota?" A lot of people will try to downplay your successes and all the accomplishments that you'll make just because you're Black.

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
	Unescapable stereotype: feeding into the perceptions	2390–2395. I guess something the school needs to do is challenge preconceptions more because by feeding into the preconceptions that you might have in regards to a certain race or a certain group of people you're automatically making them feel more marginalized at the school and just ruining their experience and ruining the diversity that you claim to say that you're attempting to allow to flourish at the school.

Based on the data collected and analysis, a hostile environment where Black men experience pervasive campus racism creates barriers for the participants in their ability to navigate socialization at a PWI. The pervasive campus racism causes climate and intergroup issues. Most importantly, as Table 9 shows, it prevents Black men from seeking professional support from the institution or their peers. The men of this study struggled with the lack of institutional accountability to stop pervasive campus racism. They experienced racism and racial profiling both on and off campus. Support was something they were not willing to seek from the dominant population.

Table 9

A Hostile Environment Where Black Men Experience Pervasive Campus Racism

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
Hostile environment for Black men	Pervasive campus racism	1263–1268. There's times where you wanna sit there and be like, "Damn, this school sucks, man. Like, this school is really damn racist here?" I'll just sit back and I'm like, well, they're not too different from the next school. We're similar to our make-up in the neighboring states around us and around the country. Man, I was always aware that it doesn't change, the difference in college is you live on this campus so you kind of don't got an escape from it.
	Pervasive campus racism	1498–1499. It's their lack of accountability, holding people accountable. They make White students too comfortable being racist.

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Verbatim transcription
	Pervasive campus racism	1655–1657. I walk down the street and I literally hear some random White dude just called me the N-word. I was like, "Bro, what? I thought this was a nice little neighborhood." But, nah, like, it's vicious!
	Pervasive campus racism	2079–2085. There was this snap... This White student dressed up as Little Wayne, fake dreads on and stuff. And then this other girl had posted the snap of him saying, "What do you dressed up as?" Then he replied, "the N-word." I remember before I seen that snap, I was a dorm monitor in McDermott and I saw the kid walking in. And at first I was just mad confused. I was like, "They really let this happen?" Because in my head I was like, you had to walk by like, at least two to three RAs before me and being an RA myself, going through the training about cultural appropriation and stuff like that.
	Pervasive campus racism	1593–1598. They would have no problem disciplining students of color. When we saw our fellow White students, it was like their identities were protected and nothing really happened to them. If one of us on this call was to have been the one that got caught in a gathering of over 20 people, they would've had no problem, matter of fact, security would've had no problem cuffing us up (laughs). Levi, know what I'm talking about.
	Pervasive campus racism	2304–2308. I feel betrayed by the college, honestly, every single time I walk on campus. I know it's a little dramatic, but it's honest. If I see something like public safety, I consider them my ops [opposition, rivals]. They've stopped me so many times, looked at me crazy just because I had a do-rag on, just walking with a hoodie on, looking at me crazy for nothing, like literally nothing.
	Pervasive campus racism	2446–2448. But as a whole, the only thing that's different from them and police departments around the country is they don't got a death of a student on their hands just yet. But, they handle things the same way, they have the same biases and macroaggressions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive and detailed evidence-based narrative of the lived experiences of the three participants in the study at a PWI, using the framework of this

dissertation to analyze the data. The participants' distinct perspectives on their experiences navigating socialization and support at School A revealed the thematic findings that were developed as a result of the data collection and analysis process described in Chapter 3. The responses from the focus group interviews and activities yielded two superordinate themes*: lack of access for Black men* and a *hostile environment for Black men*. Each of the themes was supported by subthemes and data excerpts from the participants' verbatim transcriptions and researcher journal entries. The findings were presented using an interpretive account of each phase of the data collection process. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings as they relate to the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the scholarship related to the research topic. In response to this study's findings, I offer recommendations for PWIs to help Black men navigate barriers concerning socialization and support. Finally, I suggest implications for future research.

Still ahead, the pressure is mounting for Black men in higher education. Read how their success or failure can affect institutions moving forward and why the time is now for institutions to right their wrongs of betrayal to Black men. Plus – the participants and I are no strangers to overcoming barriers, read how we are on the verge to *lifting other brothers as we climb* with the recommendations provided to increase the socialization and support for Black men at PWIs.

Chapter 5 - Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The lived experiences of Black undergraduate men have been researched in various ways, but not many studies have aimed to expose the barriers that Black men experience in navigating socialization and support by merging critical race theory and institutional betrayal theory. My researcher positionality as a former Black undergraduate at a PWI provided a touchstone for this study as the fourth participant. My positionality helped enter the conversations as an insider, someone committed to powering share with the students and then interpreting how the participants made meaning of their experiences acutely and with integrity, as I have had similar life experiences that shape my thoughts, perspectives, and feelings.

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis and counter-storytelling study was to explore the critical dialogue among three Black undergraduate men at a PWI to expose barriers concerning socialization and support by considering their lived experiences. Integrated in this study is a qualitative research method to provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Black undergraduate men, with autoethnographic narratives and insights from the researcher as the fourth participant through journaling. The findings of this study reflect the challenges and complexities for Black undergraduate men at a PWI, as narrated by the participants and researcher. As much as possible, I let the participants' voices speak for themselves via verbatim transcription, but I also discerned themes from the study, which was guided by the following research questions:

1. Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to socialization in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

2. Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to support in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

Two superordinate themes materialized from the data that directly related to the barriers that Black men experience navigating socialization and support at a PWI. The two superordinate themes—*lack of access for Black men* and *a hostile campus environment for Black men*—and six subthemes (lack of access to precollege preparation, lack of access to diverse faculty to address diverse needs, lack of access to institutional allyship, lack of inclusion, unescapable stereotypes, and pervasive campus racism) align with CRT and IBT. This final chapter presents a discussion of the research, recommendations, and conclusions drawn from the findings presented in Chapter Four. I respond to the primary research questions with a discussion of the contributions that this study makes to existing literature by explaining the themes, drawing connections to the theoretical frameworks, and sharing implications and recommendations for practice.

Discussion of the Research Questions

The relationship of the findings to the research questions is the focus of this section. The two research questions are addressed separately to understand how each superordinate theme and subtheme is connected to each question. Acknowledging the resiliency of the three participants and the researcher to persist despite the various obstacles is just as noteworthy as exposing the barriers these Black undergraduate men must navigate to find socialization and support at a PWI.

Research Question 1

Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to socialization in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

Collectively, the participants' and researcher's lived experiences and perspectives about socialization at a PWI generated one superordinate theme and three subthemes in response to the first research question. All the participants and researcher experienced inequities in access at PWIs, particularly the lack of access to precollege preparation, lack of diverse faculty, and lack

of institutional allyship. The participants did not have the vocabulary to use the language of socialization to understand the lack of access for Black men at a PWI. However, my interpretation and experiences of the phenomenon drew these parallels through detailed analysis of our unique experiences, personal stories, and emotions when discussing the topic of socialization. All of the men in this study expressed the lack of access for Black men as a barrier to navigating socialization at a PWI, which became a superordinate theme.

Lack of Access to Precollege Preparation. The participants and researcher in this study expressed a shared experience of feeling underprepared and overwhelmed when entering college due to the lack of precollege preparation. Faced with the challenges of underserved high schools, dilapidated resources, and the intersection of their first-generation status, the men entered college without the same preparation as their White peers to navigate their new academic surroundings. The participants discussed that they would have felt more prepared if their high schools provided better resources, more educational opportunities such as advanced placement courses, up-to-date course materials and technology, and organized precollege exposure activities. Similarly, as first-generation students, the participants and researcher lacked opportunities to draw upon family members who were college graduates as resources, an additional factor that contributed to their lack of college readiness before even stepping foot on campus. Without having a parent with firsthand experience to guide the participants and researcher, these Black men were forced to work twice as hard to attain socialization—the knowledge, skills, and abilities that would make them more successful after graduation.

Lack of Access to Diverse Faculty to Address Diverse Needs. Both Black undergraduate men and Black faculty men are underrepresented at PWIs. The institution of the participants of this study was no different from other PWIs. The participants all shared a common distress in the

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lack of socialization opportunities provided to them. They aspired to have a campus that would build their knowledge, skills, and abilities through engaging with diverse faculty members; however, this was impossible due to the disparities in representation among professors. As a result, the men remained hopeful that PWIs would one day establish bonds and create supportive Black peer-to-peer faculty networks to develop their socialization through intercultural knowledge and learning from other underrepresented cultures. Yet, the scarcity of diversity among faculty at their PWI created a barrier that could never be rectified during their time as undergraduate students.

Socialization occurs in stages over a student's college experience. Socialization is both cognitive and interpersonal development that contributes to a student's knowledge, skills, and abilities in higher education. The intersections of race and gender influence socialization (McGaskey et. al, 2016). Therefore, Black men who are faculty hold a major role in the development of Black undergraduate men. The participants shared that the absence of Black faculty men to address their diverse needs left them unable to see themselves reflected in leadership roles or positions of authority on campus. The men explained that it made them ask themselves what they were lacking as Black men when compared to their White peers. The lack of diverse faculty to address diverse needs presented a barrier to the socialization of Black men because it reduced their self-efficacy and increased their self-doubt as they tried to envision themselves in leadership roles or positions of authority.

The participants noted that the only place where they routinely saw Black men was on the custodial staff in their residence halls. Correspondingly, one of the few Black men in senior leadership on campus was a basketball coach, which perpetuated the stereotype that Black men are athletically gifted but academically challenged. The lack of diverse faculty in senior

leadership caused the men in this study to question whether the institution had their best interests at heart or even cared about their success and belonging. This violation of trust fostered a space where they did not feel comfortable seeking opportunities for socialization, thus creating another barrier.

Lack of Access to Institutional Allyship. Black men in this study reported that compared to their White peers, they disproportionately entered college from low-income neighborhoods, which decreased their ability to seek allyship or have knowledge of institutional allyship. Therefore, socialization is critical to foster institutional allyship opportunities for Black undergraduate men at a PWI. However, the men of this study argued that unpleasant interactions and experiences with their peers, administrators, and faculty members made them feel like an outsider on campus. Thus, they remained in their rooms or affinity spaces where they felt most comfortable and avoided socialization.

The lack of access to institutional allyship is a barrier to socialization for Black men because it prevents interpersonal engagement with other cultures, networking opportunities with other races and ethnicities, and mentorship and relationships on campus. The participants in this study said that they lacked access to institutional allyship in their residence hall, organizational funding, and in the classroom.

Research Question 2

Based on participants' lived experiences, what are the perceived barriers to support in the undergraduate experience of Black men?

Together, the participants' and researcher's lived experiences and perspectives about socialization at a PWI generated one superordinate theme and three subthemes in response to the second research question. The participants and researcher described their campus environment as

hostile with a lack of inclusion, which precludes support. In this section, I break down each of the three subthemes that relate to the subordinate theme of a hostile campus environment for Black men.

Lack of Inclusion. The men said that the lack of inclusion on campus disturbed their sense of belonging and fostered an environment that did not support achievement of their social and academic goals. The participants and researcher pointed out that while the college's number of Black men may show diversity, the degree of inclusion is demonstrated in their individual feelings and experiences at the college. The men were clear about this: the actions of the institution proved that they were there merely to increase diversity in terms of statistics and reputation. They were not a part of the institutional fabric, and neither were they integrated in campus life in any substantial way. The institution's determination to depict a good public image created a barrier to honest dialogue about these issues surrounding support and how to establish networks of unpretentious care for Black men.

The participants noted that the institution failed to incorporate inclusive language in campus-wide emails, messages, and marketing. The exclusion of their identity in the institutional language created a barrier to feeling welcomed to seek support at the PWI. All the men navigated the lack of inclusion by learning to be comfortable with being uncomfortable at all times to succeed in the White-dominated space. Learning to be comfortable with being uncomfortable is a fundamental barrier in establishing support. The discomfort did not allow them to embrace their authentic voice, identity, or culture. It set up an inhibiting environment where inclusion and support for Black men was not possible in this hostile environment.

Unescapable Stereotypes. The men of this study reported that they often encountered negative stereotypes and macroaggressions on campus. Stereotypes created hostile environments

for the men and made them feel unsafe on campus; they only felt safe when they were in their rooms or shared affinity spaces. The participants and researcher described stereotypes as triggering to their mental health, challenging to their academic success, hindering the navigation of support, and complicating their persistence in college. Black undergraduate men's fear that they will confirm a negative stereotype of their racial group can lead to low self-confidence, isolation, and code-switching, as the participants discussed. The stereotypes surrounding Black undergraduate men in this study shaped a hostile campus environment in which navigating support was exceedingly difficult.

Negative stereotypes associated with the men in this study as Black undergraduates perpetuated similar narratives that society has cast on them and made them feel that these attacks on their character and talents were inescapable. For example, the men of this study shared that they suffered from being stereotyped as lazy, cheaters, aggressive, and enrolled to fill quotas. These vicious and baseless stereotypes created an unfair need for the Black men at the PWIs to work twice as hard to prove others wrong and defy misconceptions about their academic abilities. Contrary to this undeserved narrative, the Black men in this study held high aspirations to persist and complete college. Yet, stereotypes continue to make them feel uncomfortable, unsafe, and unsupported—feelings that prevent a richer and more accurate narrative from being shared about their true lived experience.

Pervasive Campus Racism. Personal experiences with campus racism were pervasive in this study for each participant. As a result, they made comments such as, "I don't think there'll ever be a 100% level of comfort in White spaces." The participants described their anxiety about Campus Security; they were constantly being racially profiled by the security personnel whose

duty was to protect them as members of the College. This created a barrier to navigating support

and a continuous fear for their safety on campus.

The Black men felt unprotected against the embedded racist beliefs and practices on

campus due to the lack of institutional accountability to hold perpetrators responsible.

Comparing his experience with Campus Security to the recent period of national unrest about

police brutality and racial bias against Blacks, Levi explained,

> I've seen situations where I'll see Campus Security just turn a blind eye to certain kids.
>
> You know? They won't discipline them. They give them however many chances they
>
> want. But then, if it's a minority, if I get in trouble, they always jump to the stereotypes.
>
> Like, oh, I knew he was going to do that. They don't have my back at all. *I'm just there to*
>
> *show a number on a website. I don't really feel like I'm supported as much* [emphasis
>
> added].

Alex added to Levi's sentiments:

> I definitely 100% agree with what Levi's said. The school needs to break down security
>
> by requiring or enabling more faculty, security, and staff to challenge their
>
> preconceptions before attempting to approach a specific group, right? If, for example, as
>
> we say time and time again, if it was a Black person vandalizing all the buildings… if it
>
> was a Black person burning a couch in the street during the Super Bowl, there would
>
> have been serious repercussions. I guess something the school needs to do is challenge
>
> preconceptions more, because by feeding into the preconceptions that you might have in
>
> regards to a certain race or a certain group of people you're automatically *making them*
>
> *feel more marginalized at the school* [emphasis added] and just ruining their experience

and ruining the diversity that you claim to say that you're attempting to allow to flourish at the school.

Immanuel concluded the group's thoughts with these final words:

I think security is something that needs to be broken down too. When you're walking on campus, why does security for this small-ass campus need a truck, the equivalent of what the state police have at their disposal? There's just no need for that. And then, don't turn around and tell me there's no money for student clubs or no money for resources, when you're putting it towards security. And don't get me wrong, there are members of the security I like, that are really dope people, real cool people and enjoy their job and speaking with students here, but as a whole, the only thing that's different from them and police departments around the country is *they don't got a death of a student on their hands just yet* [emphasis added]. But, they handle things the same way, they have the same biases and macroaggressions, and I don't believe that bias training is long enough or detailed enough. I just don't think it's enough for the job that they hold.

I want to highlight this discussion particularly because this is an extreme barrier to support that Black men must navigate both on and off campus, especially considering the national unrest of police brutality toward Black men historically and currently. Social integration and support for Black men in the campus culture is crucial to their safety, and safety is crucial to social integration and support. As described, the hostile environment where Black men experience pervasive campus racism through profiling, stereotypes, and inequities in accountability creates barriers by weakening their sense of belonging, trust, and confidence in their ability to seek support from members of the institution.

Relationship to the Theoretical Frameworks

Chapter Two included detailed information on critical race theory and institutional betrayal theory, the guiding frameworks of this study. Integrating the theoretical lens of CRT and IBT exposed barriers in higher education for Black men navigating socialization and support, which is caused by institutional racism and the lack of holding institutions accountable to reevaluate policies, practice, and public spaces that foster inequities in their lived experiences. It was imperative to explore the experiences of the men from an anti-deficit lens and seek to understand the wrongdoings perpetrated by the institution upon the undergraduate men who were dependent on that institution. Aligned with CRT and IBT, the results included failure to prevent or respond supportively to offenses, commission of macro and macroaggressions, systemic issues of racism, and isolated misconduct by members at the institution.

The findings of the study indicated that racism is a fundamental part of the experiences of Black men at a PWI. From the counter-storytelling narratives of the participants and researcher, it was evident that Whites have benefited from racism in higher education. The men of this study described the institution as not living up to its mission and values of inclusion, which advantaged the dominant groups only. This study recognized the individuality, knowledge, and ability of the men by appreciating their intersecting identities while underlining their collective resiliency to overcoming barriers in a hostile campus environment. Moreover, this study enabled the men to share their voices and stories to develop strategies that enhance socialization and support opportunities for them at a PWI. These discoveries aligned with the core tenets of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

This study deconstructed problematic higher education practices at a PWI through examining literature and counter narratives from the participant and researcher related to race

and gender. The study reported how these social constructs of identity intersect to impact communities of color. Comparable to how CRT uses counter-storytelling techniques in the form of dialogue and personal testimonies to allow marginalized groups to share stories that challenge the beliefs of the dominant group, this study integrated counter-storytelling to provide an evidence based narrative of the findings, which respond to the research questions and align with both CRT and IBT.

This study adds to the literature on institutional betrayal theory in seminal ways. The literature review showed that this theoretical lens had never been used to explore the lived experiences of Black men in higher education. The most relatable study I could find that dealt with race was Gómez (2015), who argued that macroaggressions are a form of institutional betrayal. Gómez further asserted that macroaggressions contribute negatively to a person's mental health and that institutional betrayal is a breach of trust between the institution and the individual. This is similar to what the participants in this study reported about their experiences with stereotypes.

Freyd (2020) emphasized that events of harm may vary regarding the level of fear and betrayal they create for those harmed, depending on the circumstances and characteristics of the event. Some situations may be easily identified as involving institutional betrayal, whereas others may be less obvious. The ubiquity of institutional betrayal in the undergraduate experience of Black men meant that sometimes they recognized institutional wrongdoing and betrayal, but other times they did not. I anticipated these imbalances of recognition, which is why I selected IBT as the theoretical framework. My intention was to fill the gap and hold the institution accountable for its wrongdoing, betrayal, and failure to live up to its mission and its promises to the Black men of this study. Using IBT as the guiding theoretical framework, I was not

researching why Black men struggle to navigate socialization and support. Instead, I was seeking to understand why institutions have failed and betrayed Black men in their lived experiences in higher education as they navigate socialization and support.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was that I wish I could have interviewed more Black undergraduate men. However, the IPA research design is a qualitative method which seeks to explore a phenomenon in-depth. The results of this study are not meant to be generalized to apply to all Black undergraduate men at PWIs. Instead, this study aimed to explore the lived experiences of three undergraduate men with descriptive and rich detail for a robust evidence-based narrative account to respond to the research questions.

Clearly, there is no way that the experiences of the three undergraduate Black men in this study could encompass all of the nuances of the lived experiences of all Black men at PWIs across the United States. Similarly, I was the sole researcher in this study, which did not allow for alternative interpretations. I performed the data collection, conducted the analysis, categorized the codes into superordinate themes and subthemes, and reported the findings. I did attempt to remove researcher bias through memo checking; however, as my researcher positionality expressed through poetry, the subjectivity of my connections to the participants and their stories was present.

Implications for Practice

This study exposed barriers that undergraduate Black men experience when they attempt to navigate socialization and support at a PWI. Further research regarding the study of socialization and support is necessary to understand college impact for Black men at PWIs (McGaskey et al., 2016; Padgett et al., 2010; Weidman, 1989). Similar to peer-to-peer

interactions as a mechanism for socialization, student-to-faculty interactions act as an academic and personal support network that positively influences students' development (Tierney et al., 2005). As college personnel, Black faculty men can address the need for a space where Black men can be safe, while also recognizing and addressing the needs of that space (Mincey et al., 2015).

I hope that future studies will conduct research to determine how faculty with shared identities increase socialization and support for undergraduate men. Another area would be to explore how the intersections of Black men's identities influence their socialization and support. Finally, I would like to see studies bring Black undergraduate men and Black faculty together in an experiential design to unmask how the groups can better work together to increase socialization in formal and informal curricula.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations are offered to radically shift the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization and support at PWIs, given that the central component of this study was to expose the barriers that Black men face as they navigate socialization and support at a PWI. The recommendations stress holding institutions accountable for institutional change that invests in the lived experiences of undergraduate Black men by increasing their socialization and support in these dominant White spaces.

The following are recommendations for practice for institutions from the researcher and the participants.

Recommendations for PWIs from the Researcher

- Launch partnerships with underserved high schools in colleges' local communities to offer Advanced Placement courses and curriculum, up-to-date course materials and technology,

and opportunities to promote a high-school-to-college pipeline through precollege exposure and mentorship.

- Build relationships and engage parents of first-generation students to help Black men succeed by facilitating group activities for parents and offering coaching where institutions can answer parents' questions individually.

- Increase access to dedicated financial aid and resources that support Black men.

- Recruit, hire, train, and retain faculty who identify as Black men to address student needs and increase self-efficacy by allowing Black undergraduate men to see themselves in leadership and positions of authority.

- Construct intercultural learning opportunities for Black men to bridge gaps between domestic and international diversity. These opportunities create networks of support through institutional allyship and provide socialization to increase global knowledge and awareness of Black men.

- Grow campus diversity to allow Black men and other students to study various perspectives. Increasing diversity helps Black men hone their socialization skills by learning to communicate and engage effectively with people of different backgrounds.

- Develop mentorship and leadership opportunities for Black undergraduate men to develop socialization skills and opportunities for support while disrupting the stereotype that Black men are incapable of leading.

- Establish enhanced cultural sensitivity training in Campus Security to improve relationships, gain the trust of underserved communities, and better combat racism and racial profiling.

- Require mandatory training for all campus members around campus diversity, including race, religion, gender, disability, and sexual identity, to disrupt the perpetuation of stereotypes and create more inclusion across the campus.

- Create affinity spaces specific to race and gender for Black men that use an antideficit lens.

- Improve campus communication, messaging, and marketing by using inclusive and intercultural language with diverse representation in images.

- Broaden campus knowledge around race and culture by increasing diversity proficiency requirements, integrating culturally relevant teaching practices, and incentivizing faculty and staff to advance missions of diversity through tenure promotion and rank.

Recommendations for PWIs from the Participants

It is important to honor the experiences of the Black men I interviewed by enabling them to offer recommendations in their own voices. Below they provide recommendations for PWIs, based on the verbatim transcriptions from the data collected from each participant, about how to hold institutions accountable and enhance the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization and support.

> **Immanuel:** We all know the saying, "it takes a village to raise a child." When I think of college in 4 years, it takes a community to develop one graduate. Change can only come when you're accountable. You can't reach a health and fitness goal if you don't acknowledge that there's something you want to change about yourself. You can't reach a race or diversity goal if you don't acknowledge the reason why you need to have that goal in the first place. Our college is a place where we hope to see that change first. But obviously, the world at large, and this nation is another place, where we would really

need to see that change of just holding people accountable. Because I mean, that's the only reason you wouldn't feel privileged if you were held accountable for your actions.

Levi: I had one professor for this class, Modern Political Theory, and we had this book called *The Racial Contract.* Basically, it shows you a different way to look at the social contract. It states that White people are the only people that really participate in the social contract and can contract, and the racial contract is everybody else who's left out—and the professor was an old White lady and it was only a class of 11 people. I'm the only minority in the class, and she asks one question in the class to get peoples' brains thinking, she asked, "Who do you think would be left out in the social contract within the class?" The obvious answer was me, because I'm a person of color, everybody else was White. She went on to give a history lesson to all the other kids and I was like, you got a point. Everything you just said after that first thing was right. I appreciate that. Since then, she's always made it a thing in the class to talk about race and to make light because she knew I was uncomfortable in class, so she wanted all the kids in the class [to] be uncomfortable too. Like this example, colleges must start showing actions by living up to their promises to us. I hope it gets better. No cap [for real]. I don't know how much research has been done on subjects like this, but we are still where we're at. Always, we just gotta put one foot forward in the right direction and keep hope. Hopefully, this study helps in the right direction, honestly, I know it will.

Alex: There's nothing else I got to add. I think Immanuel and Levi have really covered it. I'm just going to say I agree and just leave it that.

Recommendations for Incoming Undergraduate Black Men from the Participants

Below are recommendations for incoming undergraduate Black men at PWIs, based on the verbatim data transcription collected from each participant, to help other Black men as they enter higher education.

Levi: Honestly, I had this conversation with my little brother because he's like, "Yo, I wanna go to your college." I said, "You really don't, bro." I tell him this all the time because I feel like I was lied to by my guidance counselors. Obviously, they ain't never gon' tell you the truth about a college because they trying to sell you it, they're not trying to shy you away from it. But, I tell him all the time, "Listen, you're gonna face some bullshit racially from administrators. You're gonna feel like sometimes your professors are against you, but you gotta hold your head up because the one thing you got that no one could ever take away from you is your name, you feel me?" He plays ball, so I know if he comes here and he plays ball he's gonna have a completely different experience than what I had just being a regular nonathlete, because athletes in themselves, they have a whole different experience. But I was just telling him, "You gotta mentally prepare yourself to be uncomfortable every day you wake up." The sad thing is he's going to be uncomfortable. He's grown up basically the same way I grew up, when I used to wake up when I was in high school, I never felt like that—that wasn't something I worried about having to deal with, like, racism. The closest thing that I dealt with regarding racism, was from a TV screen. I would hear it on the news and stuff like that. I literally tell him that, "You just gotta be mentally prepared to be uncomfortable," and I know he doesn't really get it. I know he's not gonna really get it until his first day, move-in day, when he wakes up, he's doing orientation and stuff like that. Whatever school he decides he's going to

will be uncomfortable because, like we mentioned earlier, our college isn't the only college where POCs have to deal with this bullshit. I stress that point to him. Like, "Just hold your head up, make sure [you] don't let no one else get in your way and just keep pushing." I told him too that honestly some people in this world that will never be in your life, you gotta remember that. You might have the smallest interaction with them, but that's probably the last time you're ever going to interact with them in your life. So take it with a grain of salt.

Immanuel: I actually had this kind of call last, like, April or May. We were saying the high points of college because an alum had actually reached out to myself, two of my roommates, and another one of my boys and asked us to speak with students who were considering our college among a really good list of schools. Honestly, when we talked to them we started off the Zoom call and we were kind of just chopping it up with them, trying to figure out how they were ranking our school and what their other options are, and how good our experience has been came up around midway through the call. We really just stripped it down and was like, "Yo, there has been good things, but we're gonna keep it a stack [be truthful] with you. We're not gonna be part of the ones that's feeding you bull and you get here and you're like, 'Damn, what the hell? This is not what I thought it was—this is not what I signed up for. This isn't what I paid a deposit for.'" We just told them, "It's gonna be hard. It's not easy being at a PWI, especially not this PWI," and we could only say "especially" because this is the only one we've known from our college experience, but it's gonna be tough. Teachers are gonna be annoying, admins are gonna be annoying, White students are going to be annoying. But we, we told them, "One thing you will find is community," and even as much as there is that racial divide,

some of the White students are some of the nicer kids I've ever met, honestly. They're randomly nice, it's kind of weird sometimes. I'm like, wow. Freshman year was kind of an adjustment, like, "Why did you just do that, I don't know you, like, why you just say 'What's up' to me like that?" There is the racism, but a whole 'nother thing we spoke to was our alumni network is how you can walk outside the neighborhood with a hoodie on, there's going to be a good amount of people that notice the logo and be like, "Oh, yeah, I know that school. I'm a fan of that school. I have family that went to that school." And it's like we have that always, there's people willing to reach back down and help you climb up. But, it's not gon' be all sunshine and rainbows. It's gon' test your patience, it's gon' test your mental, it's gon' test your everything you got, honestly. But, if you can make it through and you can stick it out, then you'll feel good about it at the end, you'll feel good about the mountain you just climbed and overcame. But, it won't be easy, and we said that so many times. We was just like, "It won't be easy, but if y'all come here, we got y'all," and that's as much as we could do. We can't promise that it is gonna go like this or that, or that the money is gonna be easy. All of the things that we hear about college, we were just like, "We can't promise none of that, we're not gonna be another guidance counselor or another college recruiter, honestly. The reason why this is probably the call you guys were on was because you were talking to four Black male students," so, we was just like, "If, if y'all come here, we got you. If y'all go somewhere else, good luck." And we talked to them about their list of schools and what we knew about them. We were like, anywhere you go out of your list, you gon' deal with the same shit we telling you about our school. "But, if you come here, you in the fold, we got y'all."

Alex: I can conclude by saying if I was to give advice to someone who was about to come to a PWI, I would say get comfortable with being uncomfortable because there's going to be a lot of things that are gonna try and test you, there are also gonna be a lot of White people who are gonna try to downplay your success. A little side story, I had one of my White colleagues get a good amount of internships while I've been here so, when I would share my successes with him, he would be like, "Well, you know, there's not a lot of Black people in software engineering. You don't think you're just getting these internships just because you're Black and because they just need to fill a quota?" A lot of people will try to downplay your successes and all the accomplishments that you'll make, just because your Black. But, at the end of the day, let them keep on doing that because you're up and they're not, you're just gonna keep on rising, keep on going to the moon. Just keep on making great successes and they're not. So, just get comfortable with being uncomfortable and then keep on pushing through, because the accomplishments that you'll make are gonna be 10 times more rewarding for you than it's gonna be for them, because they didn't have to go through nearly anything close to what, or as difficult as you are, or as what you went through it.

Conclusion

Black undergraduate men are faced with a host of barriers navigating socialization and support just by living their lives as Black men in spaces of White dominance. As undergraduate students, they are subjected to socialization barriers due to a lack of access in the following areas: lack of precollege preparation, lack of access to diverse faculty to address diverse needs, and lack of access to institutional allyship to navigate socialization in a campus environment that is hostile toward Black men.

Academically and socially, the men of this study exposed barriers to navigating support in this hostile campus environment. They reported many forms of racism and often being targeted by members of the college for simply being Black men. The participants are beleaguered with racial profiling, derogatory remarks, and macroaggressions—all while determined to work twice as hard to disrupt the dominant narrative and prove others wrong about who they are perceived to be. Further, there are many barriers to navigating support in formal and informal curriculum spaces. These experiences take a toll on their mental and emotional well-being due to lack of support. Higher education needs to do better for these Black men and those who come in the future.

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Black undergraduate students by exploring the critical dialogue among three Black undergraduate men, which helped to expose barriers experienced in navigating socialization and support at a PWI. I was able to capture the experiences of three Black junior and senior undergraduates at a PWI. The men unmasked what it is like to be a Black undergraduate from their perspectives and experiences. As a result, new knowledge can be added to the scarce literature on the lived experiences of Black undergraduates as they navigate socialization and support. Through this IPA and counter-storytelling study of their lived experiences at a PWI by way of focus group discussions and researcher journals, the voices of the men in the study were not only honored but valued as a genuine contribution to this research and the broader field.

This study involving the socialization and support of Black undergraduate men provides a perspective that is not typically considered or acknowledged in higher education. It is my hope that the outcomes of this research will initiate critical dialogue on college campuses regarding

campus culture, institutional policies and practice, and the role of faculty and staff development as it relates to the lived experiences of Black men navigating socialization and support at PWIs. My hope is that this study will not only serve as a motivation for more research on the lived experiences of Black men but also be a catalyst that will empower other institutions to hold themselves more accountable in living up to their promises and missions to Black men. Our institutions of higher education must support Black undergraduate men by making them a priority and not a statistic.

I would like to close by saying to my brothers: when barriers and challenges at PWIs come our way, it's easy and even understandable to get frustrated and discouraged. But remember the reason you have these big challenges is because you have a big destiny ahead of you. Average students have average problems. You're not average. You're story is far from ordinary. It is intertwined with a history and legacy of ancestors who never quit in fighting for equality and justice for you to access education. Their legacy is a part of you. Moreover, what you do with it will be a foundation for the next generation. Your purpose in higher education is extraordinary, so don't be surprised if you have to overcome great challenges. That trouble is a vehicle of transportation to your next level us success. When you achieve that success, because you will, remember to *lift other brothers as you climb*. Onward and towards what matters! The legacy continues, my brothers…

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KANSAS STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

Destination Graduation: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Black Undergraduates Navigating Socialization and Support

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant:

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Quincy Bevely, a doctoral student, under the direction of Dr. Doris Wright Carroll, the Principal Investigator, in the Department of Counseling Student Development (CSD) at Kansas State University (KSU). The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences of undergraduate Black men navigating socialization and support at a predominantly White institution (PWI).

Your participation will involve three 60-minute focus group interviews, which will be audio recorded via Zoom. In total, your involvement in this study will last approximately three hours over the course of six weeks.

Prospective participants must meet the entire list of the following criterion:
1. Identify as Black;
2. Be a male;
3. Be an upperclassman (i.e., junior or senior) at a predominantly White institution;
4. Have experienced life as an undergraduate at the college for 2–3 years (no transfers)

You will be asked to create a pseudonym that you will be referred to by for the duration of the study. All data collected will use pseudonyms. The final write-up will have direct quotes given by the participants. However, this study will not include any of your or other participants' identifiable information. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the participants' identities and identity markers will be stripped. To mitigate the risk of a confidentiality breach, only the Principal Investigator and graduate researcher will have password-protected access to the data. All audio recordings, transcribed interviews, and notes will be stored on password-protected computer and destroyed following the conclusion of this study.

There are minimal foreseeable risks. You may be asked to recall memories that may be painful, discomforting, or difficult to express. To reduce these risks, the interviewer will remind you of your right to stop participation in the research at any time or at any point in the process without any repercussions. If the interviewer is uncertain whether information you provide is appropriate for official field notes, your permission will be asked.

The results of this research may be presented at public symposiums or conferences, published in journals, or to higher education professionals. However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

Your participation will make a significant contribution to the limited existing literature on Black men navigating socialization and support in higher education. Through this study, you will be provided with a unique opportunity to reflect on your lived experiences in higher education in a meaningful way. In addition, you will be given a platform to share your lessons learned to help create change for how Black

men are perceived in higher education and matriculate through college. Furthermore, your participation in this groundbreaking research will help inform future presentations, policy development, and higher education practices for retaining and graduating undergraduate Black men. At the conclusion of the study, you will be presented with a copy of the research and invited to an opportunity to discuss the results of the findings.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions regarding this form, please feel free to contact Quincy Bevely directly at qbevely@ksu.edu or (630) 926-0438.

Please do not sign this informed consent form without complete knowledge of the information presented. If you do understand the information and would like to partake in the study, please feel free to sign the informed consent form and return it to Quincy Bevely. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Doris Wright Carroll, at 785-532-5541 or via email at dcarroll@ksu.edu. Lastly, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at (785) 532-3224 or comply@ksu.edu.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled. Below is my signature of consent.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and I willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

**Participant Name
and Date:**

**Participant Signature
and Date:**

Appendix B - Interview Questions

There were three focus group interviews. Each focus group interview took 1 hr. The questions below facilitated discussions with participants and probed to elicit deeper responses.

To acquaint participants with the research topic, I used the five-finger squeeze activity. This exercise is a unique icebreaker that helps the participants begin to think about their experiences in higher education and to create space for fluid conversation thereafter.

The five-finger squeeze icebreaker includes sharing the following: (a) thumb, something you like about higher education; (b) pointer finger, something you look forward to in higher education; (c) middle finger, something you dislike about higher education; (d) ring finger, something you are committed to in higher education; and (e) pinky finger, a fun or interesting fact about what you have experienced in higher education.

After the introductions were completed, the following questions were answered over the next three focus group interviews.

1. How would you describe your experience here?

   a. Probe: What's working well for you?

   b. Probe: What's not working well for you?

2. Please share a vision, mission, or a famous quote that means a lot to you. Please describe why it means a lot to you.

3. How are you supported here at this college?

   a. Probe: What does support mean to you?

4. How are you involved outside of class?

5. How do you interact with faculty in class?

6. How do you interact with faculty outside of class?

7. Music elicitation: What is a song or spoken word that represents your campus experience? Please describe why.

8. Tell me about a typical week for you at this college.

9. Tell me about a time when you felt at home here at this college.

10. Zoom in the Room: Share a photo/object that represents your support or experience here at this college.

11. What means most to you at this college?

12. What, if anything, makes you trust the college?

13. How do you rely on this college?

14. What ways, if any, do you feel betrayed by the college?

15. What would you tell new Black men about the campus?