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# The Impact of Mentoring in Closing the Achievement Gap for Black Male Students at a Predominantly White University in Tennessee

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

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Patricia Waire Harlan

May 2022

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Keywords: anti-deficit academic framework, Black male, CRT, mentoring, PWI

ABSTRACT

The Impact of Mentoring in Closing the Achievement Gap for Black Male Students at a Predominantly White University in Tennessee

by

Patricia Waire Harlan

This phenomenological study addressed the factors of an institutionalized peer to peer mentoring program that fostered academic success and persistence among Black male students graduating from a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee through the lens of the critical race theory. Data was gathered through face-to-face, open-ended, semi-structured interviews via Zoom with twelve participants that graduated between 2014 and 2022. Study participants were grouped into group 1 as those Black male students that were not impacted by the global pandemic and group 2 as those Black male students that were impacted by the global pandemic. Emerging themes and categories were identified by coding and analyzing the interview data. The themes that were identified were early intervention, impact of peer led mentoring, benefits of building strong relationships, safe spaces on campus, and the integration of mentorship programs into communities. The findings may provide higher education institutions with best practices models on how to further design or redesign strategies, policies, and practices that promote a mentorship culture that assist in the academic success for Black male students. The findings from this study may have implications relevant to the growing body of research on Black male achievers; as well as educational and community leaders; and policy makers on the development of practices, strategies, and recommendations to further provide effective mentorship programs that enhance Black male success on college campuses.

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# DEDICATION

I thank God for being my savior and provider. I dedicate this dissertation to my entire family and in memory of Jasmine; Theatrice and Bernis Waire; Matilda and Thomas Wyatt; Geraldine and Willis Armstrong; and Lillian Harlan. To my husband, Nathaniel, thanks for being my best friend, editor, and biggest fan on this journey. To our children Ashley, Nathaniel II, Waynetishia, and 1st granddaughter, Eliza, this is for you. You all have been the wind beneath my wings.

I would like to give a special thanks to my dear friend Vanessa, who kept me engaged and focused throughout this journey. To my sister, Janet, your daily word of inspiration nourished my soul each day and gave me that never give up mindset. To my three brothers, Tim, Dwayne, and Freddie thanks for the fun, laughter, and joy that you have given throughout my life. To my spiritual leader, Pastor Victor Goodman, who is smiling in heaven, "I made this far by the grace of God." To Dr. Robbie Melton and Dr. Janet Smith, I'm forever grateful for your mentorship and encouraging me to follow my dream. To the participants in this study, I

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

Black male students have a voice in the plight that has gained national attention for many years regarding their underachievement in higher education compared to their White, other minority, and female counterparts (Harper, 2012a). The narrative for over the past twenty years has provided a visual of the troubled status of Black men who struggle to complete higher education. For example, in 2019, the overall enrollment for Black male undergraduates at Tennessee public colleges and universities declined 16 percent from fall 2015 5o fall 2020. The rate at which Black males are retained declined eight percentage points from a high of 65 percent in fall 2010 to 57 percent in fall 2019. The six-year graduation rates for Black male students are at 20 percentage points below the graduation rates of all other students every year (THEC, 2021). Numerous scholars have examined contributing factors that affect the structural, cultural, and hostile campus racial climate (Allen, 1998; Bailey & Bonner, 2006; Carter, 2008; Guiffrida, 2005). In addition, racial and gender phenomena primarily at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), have impeded the lack of degree attainment by Black males. (Bailey & Bonner, 2006; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Feagin, Vera, Imani, 1996; Flowers, 2005; Guiffrida, 2005). Some scholars contend that while institutions have made a reasonable faith effort to improve outcomes for this population of students, their strategies have been outdated and counterproductive (Harper, 2014; Palmer & Wood, 2012). The development of positive institutional support toward the conferral of post-secondary degrees to the Black male is one of the most pressing issues facing academic and student affairs personnel in American higher education (Cuyjet, 2006; Dancy, 2012; Harper, 2014).

Although there is extensive research that provides a compelling argument that Black men are virtually disappearing from higher education, Lewis and Toldson (2012) contend that the number of Black men enrolled in higher education is, in fact, proportional to the population of Black, college-aged men in the United States. Their research and Harper

(2012) and (Hargrove & Kim, 2013) reflect the start of data collection that support that since the early 1800's Black male students have historically demonstrated a high level of interest in attending college and obtaining degrees.

Harper (2012a) suggested that although Black male students' dismal college enrollment, disengagement, underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues in American higher education; more troubling is the way educators and policymakers have continually mishandled them. Harper argued that despite all that is stacked against Black male students, there is a counter-narrative through studies, which show that American undergraduates Black males have also been successful academically (Harper, 2012a).

The National Black College Achievement Study (Harper, 2012a) is an extensive qualitative research study that is based upon 219 students who had been successful in an array of post-secondary educational settings. The stories told by undergraduate voices in Harper's *The National Black College Achievement Study* provide an anti-deficit approach to the dismal picture of research on Black male students on college campuses.

In addition, Wright (2013) wrote that literature discussing the success of African American males in academia has nearly reached repletion while highlighting various contributing factors ranging from purposeful engagement and involvement to positive influential cultural supports. When Black male collegians locate mentors, access institutional resources, and take on roles as leaders in co-curricular organizations, their academic resilience, which correlates with persistence has proven to produce positive outcomes (Palmer & Wood, 2015). These types of outcomes, which are directly connected to rewarding Black male achievements, are representative of overcoming academic, social, and systemic impediments at predominately White institutions.

Traditionally in higher education, mentorship has been seen as a long-term mutually beneficial relationship between a mentee and a protégé. However, while much attention has been given to traditional dyadic mentoring and the attributes of good mentors, scant attention has been given to the shifting academic environment and its influence on mentoring outcomes.

Peer mentorship is vital to overcoming academic, social, and systemic that Black male students often experience. Peer mentors may assist newly admitted students with time-management, study skills, organizational skills, curriculum planning, administrative issues, test preparation, goal setting, and grade monitoring. Additional support may be offered in other forms of social support for students, such as friendship, networking, and aiding the students' adjustment to college life (Brown & Davis, 2017).

Recent changes in higher education have spawned alternative forms of mentoring such as collegial, facilitated peer, functional, online, and distance mentoring. According to Krusemark and Tew (2020), several colleges utilize web-based mentoring as an innovative solution for Black male students to increase their social and technical skills. These web-based or virtual mentoring programs included chat rooms, email, instant messaging, blogging, video chats, video clips and many other digital platforms. (Gregg & Wolfe, 2015; McReynolds, & Termini, 2020). Peer mentoring matches mentors and mentees equal in age and power for the task and psychosocial support (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Collier, 2016; Leonard & Terrion, 2007; Strayhorn, 2017).

**Background of the Study**

Increasing the effectiveness of post-secondary education by understanding the plight of Black men and improving the factors that predict academic success and the graduation rates of these students remain a critical issue in our society. More than 40 states have set goals to increase the number of adults who have a college degree or high-quality professional credentials within the next few years (Nichols & Schak, 2019). However, far fewer states have set goals and created policies to

close racial equity gaps in pursuit of higher education graduation rates (Nichols & Schak, 2019). Education Trust, a national nonprofit that works to close opportunity gaps that disproportionately affect students of color and from low-income families, released a report in June 2018 that provided benchmarks for several states that established a specific set of degree-attainment goals focused on equity (Nichols & Schak, 2019). Will Del Pillar, vice president of higher education policy and practice at Ed Trust, stated "If we're going to close racial and ethnic gaps in completion, we need to have data disaggregated and colleges take a bigger role in ensuring all students are graduating" (Nichols & Schak, 2019).

Mentoring has been identified by several researchers as a decisive factor in the retention and completion rates for students attending post-secondary institutions (Harper 2006; Krusemark & Tew, 2020). Jones and Tjernagel (2019) stated that mentoring is important because it always has a positive effect on the mentee, in psychosocial and academic ways. Numerous scholars agreed that it is vital that higher education practitioners understand the positive influence mentoring relationships have on student mentees, and the student mentors (Ashman & Covin, 2010; Brown & Davis, 2017; Krusemark & Tew, 2020; Patterson, 2018).

**The Setting. PWI in Tennessee**

The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) organization is a national leader providing systems to support young men of color who embark upon and complete post-secondary education. SAAB focuses its efforts on two factors:

a) To ensure that young men of color throughout the nation have the education-to-career support they need to achieve lives of purpose and success
b) To enable young men of color to be recognized for their talent, drive, and contribution to society.

The Board of Trustees of this predominantly White public institution stated that their vision to develop the institution as a university of choice where faculty, staff, and students of diverse backgrounds and cultures choose to affiliate; where all people are treated with respect, understanding, and fairness; and where a quality educational experience enhances the growth and development of all served. In spring 2012, the predominately White public institution in Tennessee became one of the first to establish a collegiate SAAB/Brother to Brother (B2B) Chapter on its campus. Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe, founder and chief executive officer of the Student African American Brotherhood stated that of the three chapters established during that timeframe, this chapter has been sustainable because of the committed efforts of the chancellor and leadership team (Bledsoe, 2018). A critical component of the program is the peer led mentoring program.

**Statement of the Problem**

Mentoring is a relationship between a less experienced individual, called a mentee or protégé and a more experienced individual known as the mentor (Karcher et al., 2005; Packard, 2004). Packard (2004) remarked that although the traditional model of mentorships involves a dyadic, face-to-face, long-term connection, it is now widely accepted that mentoring can also be found in various forms, including those at the opposite end of the spectrum short term, exclusively electronic, and involving multiple individuals in a "single" mentorship. Mentoring relationships, or mentorships, are created to provide support and counsel to the mentee or protégé in academic, career, and psychosocial areas. Formal, informal, and peer mentoring provides Black male students with an opportunity to engage with the campus and assist with the establishment of relationship building. Mentorship has the potential to increase the awareness and understanding of the roles that institutions play in the success of Black male students, especially at predominately White institutions (Haywood, 2018; Wright, 2013).

While there is extensive research that indicates that few Black students experience success in post-secondary education, limited research has been done to investigate the phenomenon of high achieving Black male students who successfully navigate the educational system (Harper, 2012a; Douglas, 2017). This study seeks to provide a firsthand account of Black male students' lived experiences of a formal mentoring program that contributed to their academic persistence in a predominantly White institution. The study will include complex and rich lived experiences of Black male students who were enrolled at a public-funded university in Tennessee from 2012 through 2020 to understand the factors in the mentorship program that may have provided a structure for successful navigation through a higher education institution.

**Significance of the Study**

In 2012, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation established the Black Male Achievement Research Collaborative, which is devoted to widely disseminating robust research that provides social context and counter-narratives to the pervasive negative statistics, used to characterize Black men and boys in the United States (Lewis & Toldson, 2012). The Black Male Achievement Research Collaborative developed a report titled, *Challenge the Status Quo* which provides policy and practice solutions to ensure equitable resources, college and career readiness, and fair discipline practices for school-age Black males. Harper (2012a) stated that there had been limited research that focused on the Black achievers in higher education.

The study is significant because it adds to the research on the experience and impact of institutional mentoring (e.g., peer, formal, informal) that contribute to academic success for Black male students attending a predominately White four-year public university in Tennessee. While there is extensive research that indicates that few Black students experience success in post-secondary education, scanty research has been done to investigate the phenomenon that there are high achieving Black male students who successfully navigate the educational system (Harper, 2012a &

Douglas, 2017). This study provides a firsthand account of each participant's lived experiences and contributes to the emerging literature of Black males from an anti-deficit perspective. It adds to the limited research on Black male students in higher education and the programs and factors that lead to their persistence in higher education (Brooms & David, 2017; Harper, 2012a; Strayhorn, 2017).

The study's findings may provide higher educational institutions with suggestions or best practice models on how to further design and redesign strategies, policies, and practices that promote a positive mentoring environment that assists in academic success for Black male students. Findings from this study may provide administrators with assistance in formulating institution-wide, peer, formal and informal mentoring strategies, policies, and practices to further enhance the academic success of Black male students.

The findings from this study have implications relevant to researchers, educational administrators, teachers, parents, and the community on practices, strategies, and recommendations on how to further provide effective mentorship that enhances Black male success on college campuses.

**Definition of Relevant Terms**

The following definitions are provided with the intent to ensure an understanding of the use of these terms throughout the study:

African American (Black): This includes citizens or residents of the United States having at least partial ancestry from the continent of Africa. The term African American is used interchangeably with Black (Berlin, 2010).

Anti-deficit Academic Framework: An invert of deficit framework that highlights the positive (Harper, 2010).

Black male: Black male encompasses all the ethnic subgroups that comprise the Black race: Caribbean-American, Africans in America (such as Nigerian-Americans), Afro-Latinos who consider themselves Black, and African Americans whose ancestors were brought to North and South America involuntarily. (Small, 2017).

Critical Race Theory: For this study, CRT provides a theoretical framework to illuminate and enhance an understanding relative to the subtle persistence of racism and discrimination in a higher education setting. Yosso (2005) explained that CRT offers a means to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways that race, and racism implicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourse.

HBCU: Historical Black colleges and universities that were initially founded to educate students of African American descent as post-secondary schools that were established and accredited before 1964 (U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 1991).

Mentoring: This is an intentional process between two or more people in which the mentor can serve as the guide, the reality checker, and introduce the mentee to the new environment in which the person is about to enter (Jarjoura, 2013).

Peer Mentoring: This is a relationship where a more experienced student helps a less experienced student navigate the world of academia by providing advice, support, and knowledge to the mentee (Ashman & Covin, 2010).

PWI: Predominately White institution: Institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for at least 50% enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

**Research Questions**

The research tradition for this study will be phenomenological. Phenomenology is a method used by qualitative researchers to obtain information about the experiences and perceptions of people. In this type of study, the research problem for a phenomenological study

is focused on what is essential for elucidating the meaning of an event, episode, or interaction. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) contended that "qualitative approaches to the inquiry are continually being revised as data are collected and analyzed (p.64)." The research questions "emerge" from findings. This fluid process allows for an interactive relationship between questions and what the researcher has learned. The research problem is typically reformulated during data collection so that the data closely represents the reality of the individual and shared social experiences. The focus changes, depending on what is needed to have a deep understanding of the phenomena (p.64).

The central research question guiding this study was:

> How do Black male students attending a predominately White four- year public university in Tennessee perceive the key initiatives of a peer-to-peer mentoring program that may have contributed to their academic success?

The following additional questions will guide the study:

1. How do Black male students attending a predominately White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive mentoring to their overall higher education experiences?
2. How do Black male students attending a predominately White four-year public University in Tennessee describe their formal, peer-to-peer and informal mentoring experiences?
3. How do Black male students attending a predominately White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive institutional practices that promote or obstruct their success and persistence to graduation?

4. What mentoring strategies, practices, and policies do Black male students recommend to institutions of higher education for addressing the academic success of Black males?

## Reflexive Statement

Banister and Begorary (2012) stated that reflexivity is an issue in establishing the quality, validity, and trustworthiness of findings, in ethics, and in addressing power imbalances in a research project. Therefor in outlining my reflective/positionality statement, I declare a stance pertaining to the topic and to the participants.

In my statement, I laid out the preconceptions and biases of my history so that readers may consider the findings of this study considering my history, life story and its circumstances (Banister & Begorary, 2012). In this study, I explored what is at stake for me as a researcher and as a person as I conducted the research. When phenomenology is applied to research, the focus is on what the individual experiences and its expression in the language that is as loyal to the lived experience as possible (Polkinghorn, 1989). Phenomenological inquiry attempts to describe and elucidate the meanings of human experience (Newton & Rudestam, 2001). My cultural roots and life experiences are African American and female. I am an African American higher education practitioner who completed undergraduate studies at two predominately White public institutions in middle Tennessee. I am currently enrolled in a post-graduate program at a predominately White public institution in Tennessee. As a mentor and mentee, I have had both positive and negative experiences.

## Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The study involves a select group of Black male students who were mentees and mentors of a formal peer to peer mentoring program at one predominately White four-year public university in Tennessee. Therefor the results of this study may not generally be

applicable to Black male students attending other types of institutions and participating in a mentorship program.

The study is delimited to Black male students attending a predominately White institution in Tennessee. The delimitation to this study is the exclusion of women. The focus in this study will be specific to a mentoring program for Black male students that participated in a formal, peer-led mentoring program at a predominantly White four-year public institution in Tennessee.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore how the mentorship program influenced the academic experiences of Black male students at a predominately White public institution in the southern region of the United States. This study focused on discovering the strategies, policies and practices that may have proven beneficial to the mentoring experiences of Black male students when navigating life challenges on a predominately White campus in the southern region of the country.

The goals of the study are to identify the factors in an institutional formal peer-to-peer mentoring program that fostered academic success and persistence among Black male students attending a predominately White four-year public university in Tennessee. Identifying factors that foster success and academic growth could provide a framework for a better understanding improving the success rate of Black male students in higher education at predominately White four-year public universities in Tennessee. This study will allow me to share the narrative of the selected Black male students' experiences and the impact of a formal peer-to-peer, mentoring program on their academic success. Identifying factors that foster success and academic growth could provide a framework for a better understanding improving the success rate of Black male students in higher education.

## Theoretical Framework

This study will employ the Critical Race Theory framework to undergird its analysis of the experiences of Black male students in a mentorship program on a predominantly White campus in Tennessee. Legal scholars Derrick Bell, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberly Crenshaw founded Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is an analytical framework that stemmed from the field of critical legal studies that address the racial inequalities in society (Hiraldo, 2010). By using the lens of CRT, I attempted to fill a gap in the literature relative to the lived experiences of Black male students participating in a mentorship program at a predominately White institution in Tennessee. The gap in the literature reflects a version of the SAAB mentoring model that was customized to fit the needs of the students at this PWI. The B2B Chapter was found on the campus of this PWI in 2012. B2B's origin was intentionally designed around the instructional and development mentoring approach specific to Black male students on college campuses in the United States, especially PWIs. The model is designed to complement the mentoring of African American men with resources when confronted with issues around race and racism. The Critical Race Theory allowed me to consider a proactive way of thinking about approaches to the intractable and insoluble issues around race in this country and implications for Black male students on predominately White campuses (Hiraldo, 2010).

## Overview of the Study

The research will focus on identifying the factors of a mentorship program that impacted the achievement gap of Black male students at predominately White institutions. This phenomenological qualitative study includes five chapters. Chapter One consists of an introduction, background of the study, setting, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the definition of relevant terms, research questions, reflexive statement, limitations

and delimitations of the study, purpose statement, theoretical framework, and an overview of the study. Chapter Two is a review of literature that includes scholarly research on Black male students' experiences in higher education and the impact of mentorship broken down into themes of study and a summary of the literature. Chapter Three explains the research methodology and procedures used to gather data for the study. The results of data analysis and findings that emerged are contained in Chapter Four. Chapter Five presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

# Chapter 2. Review of Related Literature

## Introduction

The general aim of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how the mentorship program influenced the academic experiences of Black male students at a predominantly White public institution in the Southern region of the country, Tennessee. The review is organized into nine sections, including the historical perspective of African Americans in higher education, the role of historically Black colleges and universities, deficit portrayal of Black male students, asset-based approach to the Black male experience, experiences of Black male students at predominately White institutions, types of mentorship programs, mentoring activities for Black male students, student development in the Black male experience, the theoretical framework of CRT (Harper, 2012; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

## Historical Perspective of African Americans in Higher Education

Titcomb (2014) outlined a chronological review of the key events in African American higher education from early 1980 through 2014 that provided insight into the African American male experiences during that period. In 1823, Alexander Lucius Twilight became the first known African American to graduate from a college in the United States. He received a bachelor's degree from Middlebury College in Vermont. In 1833, Oberlin College in Ohio became the first college to open its doors to African Americans and women and has a long history of dedication to Black higher education. In 1844, Oberlin College graduated its first Black student, George B. Vashon, who became one of the founding professors at Howard University. A decade later, Ashmun Institute (now Lincoln University), located in Oxford, Pennsylvania, was founded as the first institute of higher education for Black men (Titcomb,

2014). By the 1900s, there were more than 2,000 Black people who had earned higher education degrees. Approximately 390 were from White colleges and universities. It was not until 1950 the Supreme Court in *McLaurin v. Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education* ruled that Black students admitted to the previously all-White graduate institutions were told Black students must not be segregated within the institution. These students must receive equal treatment in the education process (Titcomb, 2014). In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional. After this case defector, segregation still occurred and was standard for years after the ruling.

The term "affirmative action" was coined by Hobart T. Taylor, a Black Texas lawyer, who edited President Kennedy's Executive Order 10925. President Kennedy's Executive Order 10925 resulted in the creation of the President Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity in 1961. The U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Higher Education Act in 1975, which resulted in a dramatic shift in the landscape for higher education opportunities for Black Americans. It set the stage for diversifying colleges and universities in the United States (Titcomb, 2014).

**The Role of HBCU in the African American Experience**

Before to the Civil War, there were no structured higher education systems for Black students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 1991). During this time, public policy and specific statutory provisions prohibited the education of Black people in various parts of the nation. The Institute for Colored Youth, the first higher education institution for Black people, was founded in Cheyney, Pennsylvania, in 1837. Between 1854 and 1856, two more Black institutions were founded, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and Wilberforce

University in Ohio (Titcomb, 2014). Although these institutions were called universities or institutions by their founding fathers, a significant part of their mission in the early years was to provide elementary and secondary schooling for students who had no previous education. These institutions are listed as HBCUs; however, they did not officially offer courses and programs at the postsecondary level until the early 1900s (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 1991).

After the Civil War, public support for higher education for Black students was reflected in the enactment of the Second Morrill Act of 1890 (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 1991). This Act required states with racially segregated public higher education systems to provide a land-grant institution for Black students whenever a land-grant institution was established and restricted to White students. The passing of the Second Morrill Act allowed the establishment of public land-grant institutions specifically for Black students from southern and border states. As a result, some new public Black institutions were founded, and several formerly private Black schools came under public control (Titcomb, 2014). Despite the landmark Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education (1954), most HBCUs remained segregated with poorer families and budgets compared with traditionally White institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Nevertheless, most Black college students continued to attend HBCUs years after the decision was rendered. HBCUs have played a historical role in enhancing equal educational opportunity for all students.

**Deficit Portrayal of Black Male Students**

Historically as far back as the 1800s, research has shown that Black male students have successfully pursued of higher education in this country (Titcomb, 2014). Instead, literature has often used a deficit-informed framework by portraying Black male students as incapable, unintelligent, disadvantaged, and at-risk to fail at best (Fries-Britt, 1997; Jenkins, 2006; Harper,

2009). Such literature fed stereotypes that have been proven to negatively impact the academic performance and self-efficacy of these students, and institutional programming and policy strategies (Palmer & Wood, 2015).

In the article, *"*Race without Racism: How Higher Education Researchers Minimize Racist Institutional Norms," Palmer (2012) described the critical perspectives of many higher education scholars that study racial disparity without critically examining racism. Palmer had reviewed 255 articles written by notable scholars on racial differences in college access and outcome. The researcher realized that scholars were authentically interested in narrowing racial gaps, diversifying colleges and universities, and doing research that inform the creation of environments that no longer marginalize persons of color; however, the research has still not addressed the critical component of racism in this country.

Of the several theories that scholars, educators, and policymakers have advanced to explain school failure among students of color, the deficit model has held the longest currency, spanning well over a century, with roots going back even further as evidenced by the early racist discourses from the early 1600s to the late 1800s (Valencia, 1997). Valencia (2010) described the characteristics of deficit thinking in the context of education as follows:

1. Victim blaming: Deficit thinking is a person-centered explanation of school failure among individuals as linked to group membership that is typically the combination of racial minority status and economic disadvantage. The endogenous nature of the deficit thinking framework roots students' poor educational performances in their alleged cognitive, motivational deficits, absolved institutional structures, and inequitable educational arrangements that exclude students from optimal learning (Valencia, 2010).
2. Oppression: Considering the "victim-blamers/victims" nature of deficit thinking and the lop-sided power arrangement between deficit thinkers and economically disadvantaged

students of color, the model can oppress its victims. This type of deficit thinking paradigm holds little hope for addressing the possibilities of educational success for such students.

3. Pseudoscience: A deficit thinking model is a form of pseudoscience in which researchers approach their work with deeply embedded negative biases toward people of color, pursue such career in methodologically flawed ways, and communicate the findings in proselytizing manners.
4. Temporal changes: Depending on the historical period, low-grade genes, inferior culture and class, or inadequate familial socialization transmit the alleged deficits.
5. Educability: The deficit thinking model contains descriptive, explanatory, predictive elements, and it is also at times a prescriptive model based upon educability perceptions of low-SS students of color.
6. Heterodoxy: Historically, this deficit model has rested on orthodoxy, reflecting the dominant, conventional scholarly and ideological climate of the time. Through an evolving discourse, heterodoxy has come to play a critical role in the educational and ideological spheres in which deficit thinking has been situated.

Valencia's (2010) construct of deficit thinking served as the lens through which educators explained the disproportionate school failure of Black and Brown students or those living in poverty. Unfortunately, in current educational research and practices, marginalized students were often blamed for their poor educational outcomes by well-meaning educators who lack the efficacy to help these students (Kennedy & Soutullo, 2019).

**Anti-Deficit Framework of the Black Male Experience**

It was not until a decade later an anti-deficit model was developed by Harper (2010) that focuses on conducting research specific to Black men from an asset-based approach.

Specifically, Harper's (2010, 2012a) research provided lines of questions to avoid a deficit-oriented positioning of Black men in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. For instance, a deficit question would include "Why are Black male undergraduates so disengaged in campus leadership positions and out-of-class activities?" In addition, an anti-deficit achievement framing would ask, "What compelled Black male students to pursue leadership and engagement opportunities on their campus (p. 35)?"

According to Wood and Palmer (2015), Harper's (2010) anti-deficit model was not a theoretical framework but was the first process framework developed for Black male students. The process framework provided directions on how to engage in each activity. Harper delivered three salient examples of process frameworks that included: Harper's (2010) anti-deficit achievement framework for conducting research on Black men; Harper and Kuykendall's (2012) standards of institutional efforts to improve Black male achievement; and Ebbers et al. (2007) model of Black male recruitment. Wood and Palmer (2015) stated that much of the thinking about acceptable ways to approach research on Black males in education and students of color in general was informed by Harper's anti-deficit achievement areas of inquiry in three primary sections: (a) precollege socialization and readiness (e.g., familial factors, K-12 forces, and out-of-school preparation, (b) college achievement (e.g., classroom interaction, out-of-class engagement, experiential and external opportunities), (c) post-college persistence (e.g., business and industry, graduate school, research careers). The benefits of the process framework could be used in conjunction with asset-focused theories to explore the academic lives of Black male students (Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Harper and Kuykendall's (2012) and Fisher's (2015) framework provided a list of standards used to guide institutional efforts designed to foster positive outcomes for Black men:

1) Institutions must create well-informed, well-resourced strategies for improvement by working across departments and divisions to produce thoughtful action plans informed by broader, quantitative data.

2) Institutions must create student engagement experiences that allow students to find cultural solidarity, academic support, guidance, and safe spaces (e.g., cultural houses and centers that support and advise groups such as Black male initiative, Black Men's Unions, and Minority Student Pre-orientation).

3) Institutions must acknowledge structural racism and its effect on Black men.

4) At every level, institutional agents must be held accountable for improving Black male student retention, academic success, engagement, and graduation rates.

5) Acknowledgment that Black undergraduate students are meaningfully engaged as collaborators and viewed as experts in designing, implementing, and assessing campus initiatives.

6) Learning, academic achievement, student development, and improved degree attainment rates are prioritized over social programming. Wood and Palmer (2015) concurred that practitioners could use these standards to help identify challenges facing Black male students and create and monitor the interventions for this population of students.

For over a decade, researchers (Bonner, 2011; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2009) insisted that the focus be directed on those Black male students who successfully navigated the higher education system to attain a baccalaureate degree. Harper's (2012a) qualitative study documented 219 Black males' academic achievements at 43 colleges and universities across 20 states. The intent of the study was to explore institutional programs, peer relationships, and the effects of individual skills in garnering social capital in support of the participants' academic goals. Harper's (2012a) research described factors that attributed to Black male success as (a) the

ability to navigate racially charged campus environments effectively, (b) to become engage in the campus through leadership opportunities, (c) to receive ample familiar and spiritual support, and (d) to develop meaningful relationships with peers and mentors. In addition, the key component of this research was that participants stated this was the first time they were asked to share their lived experiences (Harper, 2010).

Morton's (2015) qualitative research study explored six forms of cultural capital that students of color brought to the classroom from their homes and communities that were unrecognized or acknowledged. The culture capitals are familial, social, aspiration, resistance, linguistic, and navigational. For this study, Morton (2015) stated that culture represented the lens through which Black male students view and evaluate the behaviors of others as well as allowing other individuals to maintain a sense of identity and impact on how Black male students perceive themselves (Bridgest et al., 2003). Yosso (2005) used the Critical Race Theory lens to address positive social and cultural capital presented in communities of color. An understanding of Black culture pertaining to education can be drawn from Yosso's (2005) study and Morton's (2015) analysis of the six capitals. The findings were a) familial capital was utilized to gain knowledge through the kinship of immediate family, extended family, and the community; b) social capital involved using community resources and networks of people who provided emotional support; c) aspirational capital was used to instill resiliency to hold to hope in the face of adversity and perceived barriers during times when goals appeared unachievable; d) resistant capital was used as a method to gain knowledge and skills in the face of oppositional behaviors and inequality; e) linguistic capital involved social and intellectual skills gained through communicating in multiple languages or styles along with enhanced abilities to communicate with a variety of audiences; and f) navigational capital utilized skills to navigate and maneuver through institution programs, policies, and guidelines (Morton, 2015).

In another asset-based approach study**,** the researcher contended that minority males must be convinced that high expectations are attainable and that they must be realistic and recognized by the student (Lombardi, 2016). This concept connects high expectations, optimism, realistic hope, and student achievement. Lombardi (2016) stated that the second concept was to help the students focus on what they could do instead of the students' perceived deficits. The goal was to mitigate the fear of failure and subsequently plan for short-term successes. In turn, by building faculty-student relationships through knowing students' names, strengths, and challenges, the faculty could begin building the trust that made it okay to fail. Lombardi (2016) concurred that by using data to foster short-term wins, students learn to own their achievement thereby facilitating the pathways to becoming academically successful.

Another example of the asset-based approach to the Black male experience was an ethnographic case study that explored how a White instructor-built solidarity with his Black male students by establishing of an effective mentor relationship rooted in trust (Boucher, 2016). This counter narrative was when a White teacher met Black students in relationships of solidarity that empowered, nurtured, and respected students (Wilder, 2007). It is important to note that the use of counter narrative in no way denotes that the lived experience of White people is synonymous with those of people of color; however, the tool of counter narrative is a powerful one which the teacher in this study bucks the trend that defines teaching.

Boucher (2016) stated that interrogating whiteness began with an acknowledgment of White privilege and examining the history of race in America, and then owning the fact that Whites are beneficiaries of the social construct of race. The researcher in this study was historically learned, had read accounts of slavery and segregation and throughout was familiar with the personal narratives of African American people from those times. Additionally, the researcher shared the relationships of mentoring solidarity with Black students made a

substantial difference in his attitude and enhanced his ability to build solidarity relationships with his students and community. Teachers who demonstrate solidarity with their classrooms are more than just caring. They also defend, support, coach, mentor, and provide for their students in ways that put student needs first (Boucher, 2016).

**Experiences of Black Male Students on White Campuses**

Several researchers have described the unwelcoming campus climate that Black male students have experienced at predominately White institutions (Burney, 2018; Cuyjet, 2006; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper 2012a; Strayhorn, 2015). Specifically, Black men at PWIs experience alienation (Burney, 2018; Fries-Britt &Turner, 2002) and described having strained and unsupportive relationships with faculty (Guiffrida, 2005). According to Burney (2018), some faculty members perceived Black males as having poor academic socialization and low expectations for their educational success. Bailey and Bonner (2006) further noted that as Black men become socially integrated into the campus environment of PWIs; they often find themselves at odds with the cutthroat competition fostered by the institution.

In the 21st century, researchers continue to note how both race and gender create stressors for Black male students, Bridge (2010). Fakunle and Smiley (2016) described how it affects their social relations. For instance, Bridge (2010) noted that Black males face many socio-cultural, academic, and negative stressors that influence their identity development and relationships. In addition, Fakunle and Smiley (2016) focused on the synonymous conjecture of Blackness with criminality within the United States and argue that the negative imagery Black males (e.g., "brute and "thug") is used as justification by law enforcement agencies to frame them as "suspects" or "person of interest." They found that media depictions of Black male victims "have remained compliant to White supremacist structures using body type, negative images (e.g., a picture of the victim in a mug shot), previous criminal convictions or charges, and allegations of criminal behaviors" (pp. 361-362). Chhabra (2019) described numerous

incidents of hate crimes and bias incidents by White supremacists on the campus at Columbia University. The university president stated that "Columbia has a fundamental responsibility to stop incidents of hate and discrimination, but given the national climate under the Trump administration, he added it is harder today to deal with this than it was four or five years ago" (p. 2). In addition, in recent years, the public killings of nationally known Black males such as Trayvon Martin, Eric Gardner, Michael Brown, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and scores of others serve as powerful testaments to these challenges.

Brooms and Davis' (2017) study of 59 Black males involved in mentoring at three different PWIs, declared that they faced a range of challenges on campus such as dissonance with students and faculty, racial stereotypes, and physical avoidance. As a result of the micro-aggressions, Black male students were mindful of their dress, behavior, their seating in the classroom and were concerned about how they were perceived, in general. A network of peers and mentoring from Black faculty helped the Black male students by providing them with negotiation tools to navigate the challenges they faced on campus.

In another study conducted by Harper (2012a), with 219 high achieving Black males attending 42 PWIs across 20 different states, students were interviewed how they internalized stereotypes on their respective campuses. Many of the respondents in the study reported being frustrated with the misperceptions (e.g., poor kid, drug dealer, athlete, admitted due to affirmative action). In addition, Harper's (2015) findings revealed that many universities had mentoring student organizations that served as a resource for Black undergraduate men to discuss campus climate, leadership opportunities, and a collective response to issues facing Black male students on campus.

Anthony et al. (2016) conducted a study with 21 undergraduate Black male students at a PWI and found that many participants reported feeling excluded and like outsiders. In one incident, the Black male student told his story about being treated with suspicion as a potential

criminal by the campus police when he walked out of a residence hall, while at the same time, the police officer let a White female student walk by unbothered (Anthony et al., 2016). Multiple participants in the study discussed feelings of isolation and loneliness due to being the only Black student in their class and in student organizations (Anthony et al., 2016). Black male students in the study found it important to share their stories and surround themselves with like-minded individuals who share their identity (Anthony et al. 2016). This study revealed that Black male leadership programs and other similar mentoring initiatives help to provide a safe space for Black males at PWIs to explore their racial identity and express themselves freely without being judged (Anthony et al., 2016).

Given the range of challenges Black males face across various social institutions, Brooms and Davis (2017) stated that providing space for Black male students to make connections and have meaningful interactions can enhance their collegiate experiences. Brooms and Davis (2017) contended that adjusting to the social and cultural environment is identified as Black student success, especially at predominately White institutions.

Brooms (2018) conducted research on a group of 40 Black male students at two different PWI institutions who participated in a Black Male Initiative Program (BMI) and found that it played a critical role in supporting students through increased access to social and cultural capital. The findings identified the significant role in the student's thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors on campus (Broom, 2018). Broom (2018) discovered four diverse ways in which BMI enhanced students' sociocultural capital: (a) establishing a home and having a space on campus, (b) gaining access to critical support, (c) providing academic support and motivation, and (d) heightening their sense of self and collective identities.

## Mentorship

Mentoring relationships can be formed in a variety of ways. Kahle-Piasecki (2015) stated that mentoring has long been considered an effective tool for developing relationships and transferring knowledge from a more experienced individual to a less experienced individual and is a concept that has expanded in definition in recent years to include non-traditional relationships beyond face-to-face mentoring. Mentoring programs are frequently supported by technology can be reversed, external to an organization, or peers (Kahle-Piasecki, 2015). The benefits of mentorship, both formal and informal have been documented in countless studies during the past 35 years beginning with Kram's (1985) research on mentoring in organizations (Kahle-Piasecki, 2015).

Mentoring programs in the 21st century are no longer thought of in just the traditional pairing such as the teacher and student, but now non-traditional relationships can be formed either electronically, with groups or peers, or a combination of several types (Barret, 2016; Jones & Tjernagel, 2019; Kahle-Piasecki, 2015).

## Virtual Mentoring

Virtual mentoring involves using computer interface that provides the ability to connect with another party (Figueroa, 2017). This engagement could be in the form of text base exchanges, audio, video, or any combination. One of the benefits of this method is that it provides more flexibility. In March 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic changed the landscape of higher education by forcing colleges and universities to move to a predominately online delivery of courses and services across the nation. Krusemark and Tew's (2020) online seminar provided the content of the post impact of virtual mentoring on the campus of East Michigan University, with a student population of 18,000 undergraduate students. During COVID-19 (corona virus) pandemic, the mentoring program has been the one constant communication tool

that ensures that social distancing is not a barrier for mentees who need to have the security of a mentor's support (Krusemark & Tew, 2020).

Virtual mentoring has become more common, especially among young people described as digital natives who have grown up using technology and electronic communication (Gregg & Wolf, 2015.) Internet or virtual mentoring expands the pool of potential mentors. Because interactions can be asynchronous, it may be easier for mentors and mentees to find time to participate in a mentoring relationship (Garcia & Tyran, 2015). In addition, the impact of demographic and physical difference, including age, race, and gender, may be reduced, and virtual mentoring may encourage more candid communication (Jones & Tjernagel, 2019; Krusemark & Tew, 2020).

Based on the research and data obtained in the academic arena, the most effective practice to achieve successful mentoring in the higher education setting was to create a mentoring culture across the university at (Doles, 2008; Lindenberger, 2006; Krusemark & Tew, 2020). A mentoring culture must be established as a part of the university fabric to achieve optimal outcomes for student success (Kahle-Piasecki, 2015; Krusemark & Tew, 2020). The researchers stated that unless a mentoring program is embraced by the university and made a part of the institutional fabric, the program will become something other than what was originally intended due to lack of support and sustenance.

**Peer Mentoring**

Brooms and Davis (2017) concurred that strong peer networks allow students to share personal experiences and confidential information so they can negotiate social and emotional concerns. For students of color, a positive peer network can help them navigate college, provide academic support, and provide a positive, supportive relationship when faced with campus racism and isolation (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2012; Heaven, 2015; Palmer &

Wood, 2015; Strayhorn, 2017). Brooms (2016b) stated that interaction with peers has the potential to contribute significantly to students' overall academic development, acquisition of knowledge, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

Peer mentoring has been recognized as one of the key components of the Student African American Brotherhood program (Heaven, 2015). The student-to-student mentoring relationship is a process of introducing the inexperienced student to the traditions of the campus culture while informally performing similar functions as the adult mentor in areas of information sharing, emotional support, and friendship (Cuyjet, 2006; Rosemond & Jackson, 2019). The benefits of a peer mentoring relationship are identified as 1) in the absence of available adult mentors, potential peer mentors generally have more availability; 2) with appropriate training, Black male students are able to share benefits mentoring relationships with each other; 3) peers are more likely to be empathetic and although not all young Black men have the same or similar experiences, it is often much easier for them to relate to the day-to-day events in each other's lives than for adult males of a different generation; 4) it is likely that peer mentor program increase the accountability of participants to each other as well as the goals of the mentoring program which is evident in academic achievement and the community at large (Cuyjet, 2006).

**Institutional Mentoring**

Mentoring benefits all levels of educational pursuit, from kindergarten to post-doctoral training (Barrett, 2016; Kahle-Piasecki, 2015). Intense dedication and follow up must be involved for a mentoring program to be sustained and endure in the overall fabric of the higher education setting. Doles (2008) stated that best practice methodologies should include the following: (1) sanction and total support of the university, to embrace the program for unity in operation, along with collaboration with university colleagues to intervene and avert student loss and attrition and provide avenues for reflection, interventions and innovative concepts; (2) a

dedicated facilitator, experienced in student development and organizational development to guide an design programming structure, maintain a strong advisory council, and community and corporate connections as a core component to guide developmental stages in a successful manner; (3) ongoing research and assessment tools must be put in place to determine the effectiveness of the program and to a gauge adjustments and advancements as deemed necessary to determine why students leave a university; (4) what students look for and need in an educational environment and what is being done on campuses across the country with comparable and similar programs (p. 25).

**Intentional Mentoring**

It is crucial to understand the ten competencies an intentional mentor can make establishing a mentoring relationship (Ramirez, 2012):

1. Developing an awareness of the mentee's state of psychological development (e.g., as described in Chickering's Seven Vector Theory (cited in Chickering, 1969).
2. Understanding the status of the mentoring relationship (e.g., whether it is just being established or is ready to progress to an amicable separation);
3. Clearly articulating for the mentee, the details defining the nature of the mentorship;
4. Appreciating the three primary mentor functions offered to the mentees- career guidance, psychosocial support, and role-modeling;
5. Maintaining a set of boundaries in the relationship that protect the mentee from coercive behavior that may compromise professional judgment;
6. Acknowledging when a mentoring relationship has become dysfunctional and implementing strategies to correct the problems or to separate amicably;

7. Developing skills in cross-gender relationships, which include developing an awareness for the obstacles and concerns a mentee of the opposite gender may be confronting;
8. Developing skills in cross-race or cross-ethnicity mentoring-this competency involves developing sensitivities to cultural differences that may exist between the mentor and mentee as well as trying to understand the obstacles encountered by mentees who are members of minority groups, particularly those underrepresented;
9. Respecting mentees as autonomous young adults who are entitled to discover and create their own paths with the mentor's support, rather than merely viewing them as the prospective clones of the mentor;
10. Remaining vigilant about the benefits that the mentor can bring to the mentee thereby ensuring that mentees do indeed gain useful knowledge and skills to advance their career paths.

Ramirez (2012) stated that a healthy mentoring relationship is founded on openness and accessibility to the mentor. The intentional mentor needs to affirm the mentoring relationship by exhibiting empathy and concern for all mentees, but especially for the Black male students. Mentorship is a unique gift that both the mentor and mentee have the privilege and joy of sharing (Ramirez, 2012).

**Mentoring Activities Used to Close the Achievement Gap for Black Male Students**

"*I have never had much patience with the multitude of people who are always ready to explain why one cannot succeed. I have always had high regard for the person who could tell me how to succeed."* (Booker T. Washington)

Mentorship is critical to the success of Black male college students (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Mentors on campus can function as critical agents who help to facilitate campus

engagement for Black males (Cuyjet, 2006; Douglas, 2017; Harper, 2012; Haywood, 2018; Strayhorn, 2017). Sinanan (2016) stated that another way to ensure the success of Black males at higher education institutions is via formal and informal mentoring programs. Brooms and Davis (2017) concurred that formal and informal mentoring provide support for Black males in a variety of areas (e.g., academic, social emotional well-being, positive brotherhood). In a study of 59 Black male students involved in some form of mentoring at three different PWIs, Brooms and Davis (2017) stated, "students leaned on their peer relationships with other Black males and saw mentoring from Black faculty as critical to their persistence efforts" (p.320).

Heaven (2015) stated that student affairs professionals must be aggressive and proactive in addressing the issues hindering Black males from excelling in higher education. The researcher identified counseling mandates, student leadership, career counseling, and mentoring programs as components of student affairs that must be implemented to retain and promote the success of Black males. This study recognized the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), which was founded at Georgia Southwestern University in 1990 as a noteworthy mentoring program. SAAB promotes the mentees to be enriched beyond the traditional one-on-one sessions of mentoring (Cuyjet, 2006). SAAB provide leadership development, tutoring services, cultural activities, counseling, personal development, and spiritual enrichment (Anderson et al., 1997). SAAB emphasizes self-esteem, achievement, and it illuminates the fact that they utilize peer mentoring (Heaven, 2015). The second noteworthy mentoring program the researcher studied was the Black Male Initiative which started at Texas Southern University. The Black Male Initiative interest was in promoting Black males to progress to graduation (Anderson et al., 1997) and how it correlates to satisfactory collegiate experiences (Heaven, 2015).

In other studies, (Douglas, 2017; Haywood, 2018; Patterson, 2018) researchers noted that mentors can be responsible for: (a) acclimating students to the campus environment; (b) informing students about campus involvement (e.g., clubs, organizations, activities); (c) professional opportunities (e.g., internship); and (d) serving as guides as students continue through college and thereafter. In addition, successful mentoring programs have increased the retention and degree attainment of Black males (Brooms, 2016; Douglas, 2017; Manthei, 2016). Brooms' (2018) study of 40 Black male students at two different institutions revealed that the mentoring group created opportunities for the participants to provide each other with motivation, encouragement, and enhanced each other's college experience. As a result, Black males who establish a positive circle of friendships with other Black males on their college campuses experience an increase in college satisfaction (Strayhorn, 2015).

Freeman and Louis (2018) further stated that mentoring had been one of the most useful tools for developing individuals and fostering success in higher education, especially with respect to minority populations. The four emergent themes generated from this personal scholarly narrative (SPN) study were (a) social capital, (b) accessibility, (c) cross-cultural mentorship, and (d) the importance of mentoring Black males. Mentoring can be a pivotal element in the individual success of the participants (Freeman & Louis, 2018).

**Student Development and the Black Male Experience**

In a study reviewing the experiences of Black students in college, Strayhorn (2017) described three key factors that influence black student success in college: (a) access (i.e., opportunity to go to college and have exposure to social and culture capital, (b) support systems (i.e., role models, advisors, coaches, and mentors to help show them the way), and (c) community connections (i.e., college environment with safe spaces designed for living and learning).

In earlier studies, Austin (1984) and Chickering (1969) posed theories which concurred that academic achievement and student success are related to student development. According to Chickering (1969), student development occurs sequentially along seven stages or vectors in college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The purpose of the seven vectors was to illustrate how a student's development in the college setting can affect the student emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually in a college environment, especially in the formation of identity. Chickering's (1969) theory suggested if the right mix of institutional support exists on campus and if students are influenced or impacted by these services, the students were more likely to complete tasks that help them to develop competence, manage emotions, move through autonomy toward interdependence, develop mature interpersonal relationships, establish identity, develop purpose, and develop integrity.

The application of Chickering's theory is deemed practical in a college setting, for example, interpersonal skills, and cultural awareness (Strayhorn, 2015). As students move toward interdependence, another research finding stated that students living at home are "less fully involved" in social, academic, or extracurricular activities in schools with others as compared to those students who live in the dorms (Chickering & Kytle, 1999). Chickering and Gamson (1987) concurred that good practices in undergraduate education include the following 1) encourages contact between students and faculty; 2) develops reciprocity and cooperation among students; 3) promotes active learning; 4) gives prompt feedback; 5) emphasizes time on task; 6) communicates high expectations; and 7) respects diverse talents and ways of learning. Specific to this study, the fourth vector, which is developing mature interpersonal relationships, and the fifth vector, which is establishing identity, have had a more significant impact on Black males developing mentoring relationships at predominately White institutions. Also, students' confidence with their own identities may also impact the

development of the relationships as well as the type of college experience received. Arthur Chickering developed seven vectors of student development, all of which could be assisted by the presence of a mentor in a student's life. The presence of a mentor can aid students as they progress through the seventh vector. In this stage, students realize that they need the instruction and help of others, most notably, a mentor (Chickering, 1969).

Researchers (Owolabi, 2018; Strayhorn, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017; Tinto, 2017) identified students' self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perceived value of curriculum as factors that can influence student motivation to persist. Scholars in the field of engagement have suggested that there is a dual responsibility for engagement and retention (Tinto, 2016). In this case, students have a responsibility to be engaged in meaningful activities, and the university has a responsibility to provide activities that will engage them (Owolabi, 2018; Tinto, 2016). It is imperative that institutions provide learning opportunities that are relevant, meaningful, and meet the needs and interest of students (Owolabi, 2018). Educators need to shift their pedagogical practices to match the needs of students of color who are often required to assimilate in PWIs (Griffin et al., 2015). The best-known engagement indicators as described in the "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" include the following: student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, respect for diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). The practices work for many kinds of students including White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, rich, poor, older, younger, male, female, well-prepared and underprepared (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Chickering and Gamson (1987) stated that while each practice can stand on its own, when all are present their effects multiply. Together, they employ six powerful forces in education that include activity, expectations, cooperation, interaction, diversity, and responsibility.

A sense of belonging is also a sense of fitting in; being part of a group, a community, and membership in an organization with acceptance from other members of the group (Owolabi, 2018). Strayhorn (2012) and Tinto (2016) research has provided evidence of the impact that a sense of belonging has on student success and retention. Students who are ethnic minorities, academically disadvantaged, have disabilities, and are from low socio-economic strata, are first - generation college students, and are at risk for degree non-completion (Collier & Morgan, 2008). The capacity of universities to increase degree completion is contingent on what they do to ensure that more of their students want to persist to degree completion (Tinto, 2016). Accordingly, the study revealed that these differences be consider with the programming and provide additional support as needed so diverse groups of students feel a sense of belonging and are supported in achieving their academic and professional goals (Owolabi, 2018).

**Theoretical Framework**

Wood and Palmer (2015) stated that researchers have ignored extant frameworks, models, and theories that were designed specifically for Black male populations in exchange for more predominant higher educational theories. When not appropriate to the population of interest, these assumptions can serve to skew the research. In turn, this method can impact the quality and usefulness of study findings. As we keep in mind, that one important use of theory is to predict future phenome; thus, weak theorizing can result in weak predictive utility (Wood & Palmer, 2015). In this study, Wood and Palmer (2015) stated that population-specific frameworks are necessary to lend insight into the unique lives of the Black male students. Accordingly, there is value in understanding the importance of the Critical Race Theory as it relates to the Black male student experiences. Mitchell and Quigley (2018) stated that CRT brought about a change in how education settings develop questions about the impact of race

and racism on poor education outcomes and another way of conceiving their social and educational experiences.

This literature review has identified five theoretical frameworks with specific focus on Black men (or men of color). Wood and Palmer (2015) concurred that spirituality is a core element of Black life and culture. Spirituality and religion influences ways in which many individuals of African descent experience and negotiate social institutions (Mattis, 2000; 2004). Drawing from this notion, Herndon (2003) examined the influence of spirituality on the academic lives of 13 Black male students at a four-year institution and noted that there were five primary expressions in which Black male students noted that spiritually supported their persistence in college: resilience; sense of purpose, direction and focus on life; institutional support from the church bodies, and social connectedness to other Black men.

While the Expression of Spirituality (Herndon, 2003) focused on the importance of resilience, other research articulated why and how resilience facilitated Black male success. Madison-Colmore et al. (2003) introduced the Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome, which was an explanatory theoretical framework for understanding Black male students' persistence in STEM fields, particularly, engineering. This was a qualitative study of 24 Black male juniors and seniors who were engineering majors that had overcome potential barriers by persisting to latter levels of undergraduate study. The researchers used a grounded theory approach, and the findings produced an emergent theory that provided insight into how Black male students were able to persist in an environment rift with perceptions of Black inferiority. The four primary components of the Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome were structural conditions: Black male students were situated in academic fields not traditionally associated with African American men, such as engineering; affective disposition and intended outcome actual underrepresentation of Black male students in the field and institutional climate filled with

stereotypes regarding the intellectual inferiority of Black men, particularly from White students and faculty; and affective response, Black men in the field must have awareness of the negative stereotypes about them in the field (Madison-Colmore et al., 2003). The Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome explained how these Black male students overcame the stereotypes as they had direct control over the outcomes of their academic future. Moore and colleagues described a wide range of positive outcomes including enhanced motivation, positive vigor, increased commitment to their course of study, academic self-efficacy, greater determination, improved work ethic, and a clear sense of academic purpose (Madison-Colmore et al., 2003).

The Socio-Ecological Outcome Model (SEO) was an outgrowth of Harris and Wood's (2012) five domains of African American male student success in community colleges. This model focused on the nexus of social and ecological planes that portrayed factors that influenced success outcomes (e.g., persistence, achievement, attainment, transfer) for men who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in education, particularly men of color. Harris and Wood (2012) identified four primary factors that influenced the success of men of color that included non-cognitive, academic, environmental, and campus ethos domains.

The Expression of Spirituality Theory (Herndon, 2003) and Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome (Madison-Colmore et al., 2003) are frameworks that grounded the Black male experience. Moving forward, there was a need to study research the Black male students experience from the lens of economic psychology. Essien-Wood and Wood (2012) extended the concept of Capital Identity Projection, to describe how capitalism fostered negative outcomes for Black male students. Capital Identity Projection as described by Essien-Wood and Wood (2012) was a harmful psychosocial disposition resulting from capitalistic value systems that occur when individuals pursue an image of economic success to the point of their own detriment. The concept emerged from a qualitative grounded theory research study of the experiences of 29

Black male collegians who were concerned about publicly presenting an image of success fueled by capitalistic values. Essien-Wood and Wood (2012) argued that that the conflation of these ideals fostered, framed, and propagated through the media to spur individual spending. Essien-Wood and Wood (2012) stated that there are several important points to note in contextualizing the Capital Identity Projection. They noted that that Capital Identity Projection is endemic to all communities in society, but that the capitalist marketing enterprise keys in one and fabricates identities both positive and negative that are unique to specific groups such as Black men. They contended that while some scholars would attribute Capital Identity Projection to being cool or cool pose, the root cause of individual actions is not authentic culture but shaped to support the capitalistic value system (Essien-Wood & Wood, 2012).

Bush and Bush (2013a, 2013b) introduced the African American Male Theory (AAMT), a metal-level theory for understanding the lives of Black men. This theory specifically focused on articulating the position and trajectory of African American boys and men in society and included one of the tenets of CRT (Bush & Bush, 2013a). The fifth tenant of AAMT espoused that race and racism coupled with classism and sexism have a profound impact on the lives of Black men. Bush and Bush (2013a) research noted that that this perspective emanates from CRT, recognizing that racism is omnipresent in American life and society.

Wood and Palmer (2015) concurred that collectively these frameworks acknowledge the role that stereotypes, race, and racism have in the lives of Black men in general and in academic contexts for Black male students (Bush & Bush, 2013a; Essien-Wood & Wood, 2012; Harris & Wood, 2012; Herndon, 2003; Madison-Colmore et al., 2003). The Proven-Them-Wrong Syndrome emerged from climates rife with racism and stereotypes. Another perspective emerged in 2012, Essien-Wood and Wood articulation that the economic base produced racism and stereotypes by suggesting that capitalist marketing enterprises shape stereotypes about Black

men to foster consumerism and materialism. The review of the five theoretical frameworks specific to Black men have described tenets of the CRT.

Allen (2017) identified the five tenets of CRT as (1) Racism is permanent. Racism is so ingrained in American culture that it is normal and natural (McCoy, 2015). White, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual norms of the dominant group have become the point of reference against which other groups are judged. This group determines the norms which define what is right and wrong and expect other groups to conform (Goodman, 2011). As a result, the strategy of CT is to expose racism for what it is (Ladson-Billings, 1998). (2) Challenging the Dominant Ideology (Critique of Liberalism): CRT challenges White privilege and the concepts of objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity. CRT scholars argue that these concepts function as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of the dominant culture of America (McCoy, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 1997). (3) Centrality of Experiential Knowledge: The knowledge of people of color is valuable (Allen, 2017). The expression of oppression such as racism and sexism, is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding and analyzing the plight of these marginalized groups (Allen, 2017). CRT draws on the lived experiences of people of color by including storytelling, family histories, biographies, and narratives (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Smith et al., 2007; Harper, 2010; 2012). These counter-stories originally aimed to restructure legal scholarship and were intended to illuminate, by contrast, the majoritarian story represented by the law (Closson, 2010). This is Where CRT found its place in other arenas such as education. (4) Interest Convergence Theory: CRT scholars posit that the advancement of the interest of people of color will only occur when there is a convergence of the interest of those in power (McCoy, 2015). Goodman (2011) takes the concept further and explained that our society encourages the dominant culture to be self-focused, see others as a threat to feel superior. These messages become internalized and lead to

resistance. As result, CRT scholars focus on the opposition and elimination of racism, sexism, and the empowerment of people of color (McCoy, 2015; Smith et al., 2007). (5) Intersectionality: Intersectionality involves the assumption that people of color not only experience oppression because of race but also because of other identities, such as gender, class, religion, ability/disability, sexual orientation, and forms of oppression, such as sexism, ableism, and homophobia (Ladson-Billing, 1999; McCoy; 2015; Yosso, 2005)

Allen (2017) found that most recent critical race scholars, in the field of education have expanded their focus to the areas of epistemology policy, pedagogy, and curriculum. Although institutions of higher education are particularly good at designing inclusive mission and vision statements, achievement of that goal is not only difficult but sometimes are proven to be impossible. Upon review of the literature pertaining to institutions of higher education, CRT scholars have focused on the areas of (a) colorblindness, (b) selective admission policy, and (c) campus climate (Calderon & Ledesma, 2015). They pointed out that the majoritarian framework that has traditionally shaped educational access and opportunity for marginalized students has been explored by critical race scholarship. This scholarship has reinforced the fact that race and racism matter. Calderon and Ledesma (2015) further explained that the exposure of the prevalence of White supremacy continue to shape the culture of many college and university campuses. In fact, the researchers stated that it is usually in the guise of colorblindness which is rooted in the belief that claiming to see skin color and race leads one to be racist. Unfortunately, Calderon and Ledsman (2015) stated that the concept of colorblindness tends to ignore the fact that it continues to support White supremacy, the privileges it affords, and the continuation of discrimination against students of color. The denial of a system of privilege and oppression minimizes the disparities that exist between White people and marginalized groups, resulting in the blaming of their shortcoming being

placed on the students of color (Diggles, 2014). Calderon and Ledesma (2015) expressed the need for educators to examine their attitudes that they bring into the classroom in that many of their attitudes mimic the larger system of White supremacy. In turn, this prevents them from teaching in ways that are culturally relevant, which results in the minimization of the impact of racism.

Howard's (2014) article, "Black Male (D): Peril and Promise in the Education of African American Males," provided an excellent analysis of the complexity of issues that Black male students encounter in education. Howard (2014) proposed that the application of CRT with a specific focus on the counter-storytelling tenet, be used as a methodological tool to address the historical victimization and ongoing marginalization of Black males in the U.S. educational system. His treatise argued for the utility of CRT as a methodological, analytical, and theoretical lens to view and question inequitable educational practices (Howard, 2014). In addition, the utility of CRT should make an appeal for radical reform in the education of Black male within an increased pluralistic landscape of diversity and immigration in the U.S. (Howard, 2014). Howard (2014) stated that given the massive under-preparation of educators to address the intersection of race, culture, class, gender, sexuality, and religious diversity in the curriculum, there should be a call for reform to provide timely advocacy for creating alternative education strategies for Black males.

**Chapter Summary**

The literature review uncovered the transformation of mentorship in higher education in the 21st century and racial relations that are still prevalent in our country that have impacted the Black male student experiences on White college campuses. Researchers have identified several factors that impact the Black male students' experiences and persistence historically, at historical Black colleges and universities, at White institutions, the mindset of deficit thinking,

progression of the anti-deficit framework model, the components of student development, the impact of mentorship in the lived experiences of Black male students, and the value of the critical race theory (CRT) framework.

One conclusion drawn from the review of literature is that from an asset-based approach, Black male students are best at telling their success stories of the advancements they have made in higher education. Higher education policymakers, faculty, staff, and administrators on White campuses need to pay close attention to how Black male students describe their experiences, expectations, concerns, and fears. Higher education must eradicate any institutional barriers to Black male students' success and develop specific programs like mentorships that focus holistically on positive attainable outcomes resulting in the richness that cultural diversity and inclusion bring to our college campuses.

# Chapter 3. Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences, interactions, and involvement of twelve Black male students in an institutionalized Black male mentorship program at a White higher education institution in Tennessee. The research focused on examining and achieving a deeper understanding of the peer- to-peer mentorship initiatives' impact on Black male students that may have contributed to their academic success. In addition, the study highlighted the deficit and anti-deficit portrayal of Black male students through the lens of the Critical Race Theory in higher education. The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the impact of a peer mentorship program for Black male students through their lived experiences on a White college campus. To gather accurate research and results, the study utilized a phenomenological research design of the study. The methodology was designed to assist the researcher in gaining better and complex research data. This chapter provided details regarding the research design, participants, instrumentation, data collection methods, and methods of analysis used in this study.

## Qualitative Research

Methodology is best described as a strategy that guides the actual research plan and provides specific direction for procedures in a research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The qualitative design method is associated with examining the impact of a variable such as a human or social predicament people encounter in life. Fundamentally, the purpose of qualitative research is to explore and make meaning of an individual's ascribed living experience (Giorgi, 2009).

In addition, Creswell and Creswell (2018) described this process of research as follows: involving emerging questions and procedures, collecting data in the participant's setting, analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes, and making interpretations of the meaning of the data. Thus, while the process begins inductively, deductive thinking also plays a significant role as the study moves forward. The final written report has a flexible writing structure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Qualitative research design empowers research participants to share their stories and provide more detailed description of their lived experiences than quantitative methods, such as surveys yielding data that can be analyzed statistically (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, a qualitative approach was selected because it was suited to areas that specifically related to lived experiences, impacts, and encounters pertaining to individuals in their given setting. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), qualitative methodology allows a platform for people openly to be expressive of their lives, experiences, emotions, and feelings.

Qualitative researchers increasingly use a theoretical lens or perspective that provides an overall orienting lens for the study of questions of gender, class, and race of marginalized groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This lens become a transformative perspective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study used the critical race theory to address structured inequities and the lived experiences of racism and white privilege in our society. The Critical Race Theory (CRT) offered a theoretical framework for understanding racism as it intersects with other social identities. It also provided methods for both research and praxis that work to address race and racism in systems. Using CRT as a theoretical framework disrupted the narrative of what is normal and challenged the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color.

**Phenomenological Study**

Phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The phenomenological method attempts to explore and discover the underlying meanings of lived experiences to arrive at a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (VanManen, 2014). The phenomenological concept has its roots in the philosophical writing of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Lark Moustakas. Moustakas (1994) described phenomenology as a philosophical method grounded in subjective openness. The phenomenological research process consists of four core values: (a) the epoch, (b) reduction, (c) ingenious variation, and (d) synthesis stage. According to Moustakas (1994), the phenomenological approach provides, "logical, systematic and coherent resources for carrying out the analysis and synthesizing information to arrive at essential descriptions of experiences" (p. 47).

Fundamentally, the phenomenology concept attempts to understand how others view the world and how the world appears to them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moustakas (1994) explained that the phenomenological study involves: (1) identify a thing, a phenomenon, whose essence the researcher wants to understand; (2) the researcher identifies is or her biases and set them aside, known as bracketing; (3) the researcher collects narratives about the phenomenon from people who are experiencing it by asking open-ended questions and then probe to let them run with; (4) the researcher uses intuition to identify the essentials of the phenomenon; (5) the researcher lays out those essentials in writing with exemplary quotes from the narratives; (6) the researcher repeats steps four and five until there is no more to learn about the lived experiences of the participants studied.

The qualitative phenomenology approach enabled the researcher to collect raw data in the social and academic environments of the Black male students. By using the qualitative phenomenological research method, Black male students were able to respond to questions in an elaborative way, by personally accounting for events and giving a firsthand story of their experiences. In this study, Black males' experiences and impacts of a peer mentorship program on their academic success were examined.

**Research Questions**

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), research questions assume two forms:

a) central question

b) associated sub questions

In a phenomenology study, the questions might be broadly stated without specific references to the existing literature or a typology of questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As stated by Moustakas (1994), these inquiries are designed to probe the selected participants about their lived experiences and the circumstances surrounding their experiences. To have a comprehensive and concise understanding of the complexities surrounding the experiences of Black male students in a peer mentorship program the following questions were developed:

**Central Question:**

How do Black male students attending a White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive key initiatives of a formal peer led mentoring programs that may have contributed to their academic success?

**Sub-questions:**

1. How do Black male students attending a White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive mentoring to their overall higher education experiences?

2. How do Black male students attending a White four-year public university in Tennessee describe their formal, peer-to-peer and informal mentoring experiences?
3. How do Black male students attending a White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive institutional practices that promote or obstruct their success and persistence to graduate?
4. What mentoring strategies, practices, and policies do Black male students recommend to institutions of higher education for addressing the academic success of Black males?

**Researcher's Role and Reflexivity**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that in a qualitative research methodology, the researcher must reflect about her role in the study and her personal background, culture, and experience hold potential for shaping her interpretations of the themes she advances and the meaning she ascribes to the data. The researcher's statement of her role and reflexivity in the study's process is more than advancing biases and values in the study. The statement reflects how the background of the researcher may shape the direction of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method allows for the researcher's reflexive thinking to be incorporated into the qualitative study (Creswell, 2016).

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the researcher is a key instrument of the study. In this role I collected data through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. Collection of data and information from the participants was done by using several qualitative protocols; however, the interpretation was done by me. I used an instrument for recording the data, gathering the information, and interpreting it. Sufficient reflexivity occurs when the researcher record notes during the study, reflects on their own

firsthand experiences, and considers how personal experiences may shape the interpretation of results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I limited my discussions about my personal experience so that I did not override the importance of the content or methods in this study. As the researcher, I am aware of previous and personal connections that I have with the participants and the research site that influenced my interpretations of the data and information. This is referred to as backyard research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I take full responsibility that my study did not compromise the data that was collected and did not place the participants or myself at risk (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this phenomenological study, the researcher adhered to all these principles.

My perceptions of mentorship and the Black male experience have been shaped by my personal experiences. For more than two decades, I have served as a mentor and numerous capacities in higher education, in the community, and through my religious affiliation. Most recently (2014 through 2020), I served as a higher educational practitioner in business services, academic affairs, and student affairs at a small college in the South. I have been an advocate for equality for all students in the areas of student success, persistence, retention, and engagement for the past 20 years. In addition, I collaborated closely with the Assistant to the President of Access and Diversity in the development of the first diversity plan that was implemented on our campus in 1992. This understanding of the context and role enhances my awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity to many of the opportunities and challenges of Black male students in this study. Particular attention has been paid to the institutional policies and programs developed to ensure equity and the sustainability of high impact practices in higher education for students of color, especially Black male students.

Due to previous experiences working closely with disadvantaged populations of students, especially students of color, I bring certain bias to this study as an African American female that

has been a mentee and mentor. Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity, these biases shaped the way I viewed the data I collected and the way I interpreted my experiences. I commence this study with the perspective that the impact that mentorship has on the Black male experience at a predominately White institution is complex. I viewed this study as an opportunity to share more of the anti-deficit concepts to counter the deficit approach that is most prevalent in this area of the research.

**Site and Participant Selection**

One of the basic characteristics of qualitative research is to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), this up-close information gathered by talking directly to participants and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research. In a natural setting, the researcher has face-to-face interaction, often extending over a period of time.

The study was conducted at a predominately White four-year public university in Tennessee located in the South via Zoom recorded sessions. The participants for this study were selected from a population of 60 Black male students enrolled in an undergraduate program at the university in Tennessee who participated in the Brother to Brother Mentorship Program. This chapter chartered in 2012, was the first chapter of the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) organization in Tennessee. The participants were selected based upon the following criteria:

(1) They all identified as African American or Black male; (2) They all attended the University of Tennessee in the South; (3) They all were of age 18 or older; (4) They all participated in a peer mentorship program specifically the Brother to Brother (B2B) chapter.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that the data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study through sampling and recruitment, collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information. Furthermore, the interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended questions and comments (Moustakas, 1994). I used a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) guided by the research questions with additional follow-up questions for a more meaningful engagement with the participants. Semi-structured interviews offer topics and questions to the participant but are carefully designed to elicit the participant's ideas and opinions on the topic of interest, as opposed to leading the participant toward preconceived choices. The semi-structured format underlying principles are to strive to avoid leading the interview or imposing meaning and to create relaxed comfortable conversation. Field notes, recordings, and journaling were used to collect data from the interviews.

In terms of the number of participants and sites involved in the research, Creswell and Creswell (2018) concurred that there is not a specific answer. However, from a review of several qualitative research studies. A form of purposive sampling of twelve Black males, ages 18 and older, who attended a predominantly White public institution and engaged in a peer mentorship initiative entitled Brother-to-Brother (B2B) were selected to participate in the research study. The researcher used one primary method of recruitment to contact the participants for the study. The researcher contacted the director of the B2B Chapter at the university by email and asked for the participants' contact information to request their willingness and cooperation to assist with the study. Among the selected volunteered participants, the researcher incorporated a chain-referral sampling, which is another type of

purposive sampling. Chain referral sampling refers to a process wherein participants who are contacted and agree to be involved in the study will contact others in their social network and refer the potential participants to the researcher (Guest et al., 2005). The aim of qualitative study was to research selected participants to address and understand the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Data Analysis**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that the intent is to make sense out of text and image data during the analysis phase by using a process like peeling back the layers of an onion. During this process, the researcher was segmenting and taking apart the data to understand the meanings, interpretations, experiences and lived stories of the participants. An overview of the data analysis process included the following steps (Creswell & Creswell, 2018):

1. Organized and prepared the data for analysis. This involved transcribing interviews, optically scanning materials, typing up field notes, cataloguing all the visual materials, and sorting and arranging data into diverse types depending on the sources of information.
2. Read or looked at all data. This step provided a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning.
3. Coded all the data. Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins (Rallis & Rossman 2012).
4. Generated a description and themes. I used the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes to analysis. Description involved a detailed description of information about the Black male students at the university. In a phenomenological study, themes are shaped into a general description with the intent

of developing complex theme connections, going beyond descriptions, and theme identification.

5. Representing the description and themes. The most popular approach was to use a narrative passage to convey the "findings" of the analysis.
6. Specific coding procedures. I assigned the codes/themes to three groups: expected codes, surprising codes, and unusual codes. This step helped to ensure the qualitative "findings" represented diverse perspectives.
7. The codes were arranged into a conceptual map that showed the flow of ideas in the "findings" section.
8. I wrote the narrative for each theme that went into the "findings "section of the study.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of results is the bedrock of qualitative research (Birt et al., 2016). Researchers concluded that it is important to scrutinize the trustworthiness of every phase of the analysis process, including the preparation, organization, and reporting of results. As these phases should give a reader a clear indication of the overall trustworthiness of the study (Elo et al., 2014). Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that in ensuring trustworthiness, the following strategies should be employed:

1. Triangulation of data: Data was collected through multiple sources to include semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis.
2. Member checking: To enhance the validity of the study, member checks was conducted with four participating students recruited from the institution, to provide opportunities for transcript corrections and elaborations.
3. Peer examination: Peer review and examination was used to improve my research trustworthiness. Peer reviews were conducted by recruiting faculty members,

researchers, and others with the expertise and knowledge to render decisions of quality and to offer improvements.

4. Participatory modes of research: I ensured that participants of the study gave their honest, voluntary, and subjective answers to the questions and ensure that the environment and protocols of the study was non-coercive.
5. The researcher engaged in all phases of this study, from the design of the project to checking interpretations, and conclusions.
6. Clarification of this study researcher bias was articulated in writing in the dissertation under the heading, "The Researcher's Role and Reflectivity."

**Ethical Considerations**

I contacted the administrator at the Office of Student Development, Equity, and Diversity requesting the need for the researcher to seek access to confidential records of the twelve participants at the University of The South. Following the approval by the Institutional Review Boards from East Tennessee State University and the University of The South, a letter was sent to the participants that outlined the research project goals and objectives. Prior to conducting the interviews, an Informed Consent Document that clearly details the purpose of the research, the research method, recording instruments, and goals, was distributed to each participant. This document emphasized their right to refuse participation, to withdraw from the study at any time, or to extract their words at any time without impunity. Throughout the study, the ethical guidelines established by both universities Institutional Review Boards (IRB) were followed to ensure maximum safety and minimal risk for each participant. Upon conclusion of the study, participants will have the opportunity to receive a completed copy of the dissertation.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the qualitative methodology of phenomenology as the instrumental research design. In addition, it provided relevant explanations for the benefits of utilizing a phenomenological approach with this study. The next sections provided the research questions, the researcher's role as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis. In conclusion, trustworthiness and ethical consideration of the researcher's conduct were provided.

# Chapter 4. Findings

The findings involved careful reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts, documents, and observations of field notes to identify meanings, patterns, and themes. CRT was used as a lens of analysis to examine the experiences of twelve Black male students at a predominantly White university in Tennessee. The participants' stories illustrated in rich detail the impact the mentorship program had on closing the achievement gap for them at this university. Understanding the first-hand experiences of these students enhances the likelihood of successful interventions to assure their academic success and persistence to graduation.

Mentorship programs are not a new phenomenon in higher education. However, limited information is available regarding how effective those initiatives of a peer-led mentoring program explicitly designed by Black male students for Black male students are in achieving their desire. Heighten understanding of issues and challenges faced by Black males on many college campuses should no longer be an option, but a mandated call for action.

The central question and sub-questions are as follows:

**Central Question**

(Q1): How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive key initiatives of a formal peer to peer mentoring program that may have contributed to their academic success?

**Sub-Questions**

(Q2): How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive mentoring to their overall higher education experiences?

(Q3): How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee describe their formal, peer to peer, and informal mentoring experiences?

(Q4): How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive institutional practices that promote or obstruct their success and persistence to graduation?

(Q5): What mentoring strategies, practices, and policies do Black male students recommend to higher education institutions for addressing the academic success of Black males?

**Analysis of the Interview Data**

In search of a thorough understanding of Black male students' experiences on a predominantly White campus, the research process involved continuous contact with the advisor of the mentorship program, founder of the Student African American Brotherhood, and the Black male participants for ten months. During this time, I conducted several interviews with the program advisor, collected an institutional document from the co-founder of the B2B chapter, and collected information about the program from the university's website. Most importantly, due to the COVID-19 protocol, interviews with the twelve participants were conducted through the Zoom platform from March until June 2021. Follow up interviews with four participants were conducted through Microsoft Teams in December 2021. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and stored in the Panopto program located on a secured server at the university where I was enrolled. In addition, I transcribed the initial transcription of each participant's interview. The coding scheme for the interview transcript was both inductive and deductive (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Inductively, I read the transcripts line by line, searching for and focusing on recurring themes related to how the Black male students perceived their understanding of the peer-led mentoring program on the campus of a PWI and their salient experiences. Deductively, I searched for themes noted in the extant literature on Black male students' developmental experiences that correlated with these participants' experiences.

The personal narratives of each participant were used in this section to organize and present the findings of the phenomenological study. They are presented in unity with the central themes and sub-themes that emerged through the semi-structured interview process. The university, advisor of the B2B program, and each participant were given a fictional name (pseudonym). In addition, the interview transcription was reviewed and approved by each participant. This triangulation process provided additional insight, accuracy, and credibility to my findings.

The participants' voices and stories are paramount to this analysis. In their own words are positive, sometime painful but hopeful descriptions of their college experiences in the classroom, outside the classroom, and in the community where the university was located. It is my belief that their collective stories provide implications for institutional practices, strategies, and policies.

**Phenomenological Study and Critical Race Theory**

Exploring the underlying meanings of lived experiences to arrive at a deeper understanding (VanManen, 2014) allowed me to set aside my biases and capture personal and cultural dimensions beyond quantifiable data. Although quantifiable data is important, the student stories with examples of power, privilege, and oppression illustrate and evaluate the effectiveness and inefficiencies of resources allocated to programs like mentorship for Black male students at PWIs.

Howard's (2014) provides an analysis of the complex issues that Black males encounter in education. Quigley and Mitchell (2018) state CRT in education offers several foundational tenets to inform theory, research, and pedagogy that provides a lens for analyzing the educational struggles of Black males while also providing remedies. Howard (2014) proposes the application of CRT with a specific focus on the counter-storytelling tenet as a methodological tool to address

the ongoing marginalization of Black males in U.S. schools. Delgado and Stefanci (2001) define counter-storytelling as a method of telling stories that "aim to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises of myths, especially ones held by the majority" (p.144). DeCuir and Dixon (2004) and Delgado and Stefanic (2001) explain that counter-storytelling serves the purpose of myth debunking, which exposes and analyzes normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes. Delgado and Stefanic (2001) state counter-storytelling in essence, helps us to understand what life is like for others and invites the reader into a new and unfamiliar world (p.41).

Through the lens of CRT, the data analysis process focused on the subtle ways that race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact academic structures, practices, and discourses at this PWI. Intentional and unintentional discriminatory practices affect students' academic capacity. Their collective stories told through the counter-narrative tenet of CRT shed light upon critical changes that need to occur and suggest improvements for more robust educational outcomes. Fusing the theories of CRT into a practical application like mentorship may lead to closing some of the achievement gaps that Black males experience at PWIs.

**Participants' Profiles**

This section provides a profile of the twelve student participants. A brief description of each participant is presented so that the reader may be familiar with the participant and develop a connection with their stories. This study was conducted during a global pandemic, COVID-19. The students have been identified in two groups that include pre-COVID-19 participants and COVID-19 participants. This section also provides insight into their student development experiences.

**Group 1. Pre-COVID Participants**

Patrick was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly Black high school in west Tennessee. He chose this university because he wanted a different experience away from home but close enough to return if needed. The most valuable lesson he learned about being a member in B2B was the value of diversity. He stated that members of this organization came from different upbringings, places, and life experiences with the commonality of being the best versions of themselves. Patrick describes his experience as follows:

> I intentionally joined the B2B program because I realized early in my collegiate experience that I needed a support system of brothers that intentionally wanted to graduate. I was not interested in being affiliated with a Black Greek-letter male fraternity. This was the only Black male focused organization at the PWI that had strong visibility and recognizable creditability. I served as a member of the Executive Board. My mantra… accountability is critical to your success as a Black male attending a PWI, your first responsibility as a student is to hold yourself to a standard that exceeds all expectations that your peers, faculty and staff have of you.

Chief was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly White high school in middle Tennessee. He chose this university because he had a sibling that was a graduate of this university. Furthermore, he had toured the campus and had many opportunities to experience this university's environment. The most valuable lesson he learned as the founder of the B2B chapter was that he had the tools to be successful and instill that belief in others. Chief reflections:

> The killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012 had a tremendous impact on my Black awareness as I struggled with the devastation of his death as a Black male student at a PWI. I

> realized how much my identity as a Black male mattered in navigating the challenges of prejudice and racism in the United States. Trayvon's killing focused and galvanized my decision to actively be engage in the mentoring initiative designed to recruit and retain Black males at this university. My mantra: As founder, of the B2B Chapter, I realized that I had to produce with my actions not just words the change that I wanted to see for Black males at this PWI which required a sense of urgency, innovation, and resilience.

James was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly Black high school in west Tennessee. He chose this university because he wanted to move from home but be close enough to return. The most valuable lesson that he learned was that he had to be willing to move out of his comfort zone to grow and become the best version of himself. In his own words:

> I struggled with academic vigor and had an imposter syndrome mindset when I first arrived on campus. The B2B advisor and mentors provided me with an abundance of resources and held me accountable in using those resources. The highlight of my experience was learning the language of success as a Black male which helped me to adjust academically, socially, and culturally to a diverse environment. Serving as a member of the Executive Board, equipped me with leadership skills and public speaking opportunities that helped me to be confident in my abilities. B2B provided a safe space and a sense of comfortability for me to learn and grow…so much so that I am currently a post-graduate student working on my master's degree at this university.

Silk was a first-year student attending a PWI in west Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly White high school in west Tennessee. He chose this university because he had a sibling that was currently enrolled at this higher education institution. The most valuable lesson

he learned from his experience was that accountability is critical if you want to be successful in life. Silk shared the following:

> I was the first member to be suspended from the B2B program because of my pride and inability to hold myself accountable for my actions changed the trajectory of my life. I was "Mr. Personality" and strongly embraced my Blackness in a manner that was not in alignment with the B2B mission and purpose on campus. I lost my position as an Executive Board member as well as my self-esteem. But...I am grateful for the "but" because it saved my life. These brothers continue to love and support me through my adversities. The brotherhood has been sustained for 10 years as many of the members of the first Executive Board in 2012 are now my Black Greek fraternity brothers. I graduated from this PWI in 2016. I am currently a business entrepreneur with plans to develop a documentary of my life that will include my experiences at this university.

Sir was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly White high school in west Tennessee. At the time, he was not in a good relationship with his parents and needed to get away. His best friend encouraged him to join him at this university. The most valuable lesson he learned was how to pivot when faced with challenges because challenges are a part of growth development. Sir elaborated on his experiences:

> Although my dad is White and my mom is Black, I identify as a Black male because my roots are heavily grounded in Blackness. My awareness of my racial identity provided me with self-efficacy that served me well at this PWI. I did not fully understand the mentorship component of B2B until after graduating…you see I was the student who seemingly did college well as viewed by my family and friends. As a student, I was more focused on the social experience and strongly felt that academic success was a byproduct

> of the complete college experience. It was just recently that I began to reflect on the magnitude of lessons I learned from B2B meetings, workshops, and social events which were bridges to my success as a professional in the field of engineering. I also recognized my membership on the Executive Board and President of the Chapter prepared me for leadership roles that enhanced my professional growth and development…having a safe space (physical and mental) to be vulnerable in uncomfortable conversations, networking, and real character building with brothers (peers) was priceless. My participation in the B2B program allowed me to establish meaningful relationship that transition my membership in the Black Greek Fraternity world. I will continue to pay it forward in the community where I work and live.

Samuel was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly White high school west in Tennessee. He toured several colleges but fell in love with the beautiful scenery in Tennessee. Secondly, this university was known for having an outstanding program in his chosen major. The most valuable lesson he learned was never to underestimate the importance of building strong relationships and networking. In his own words:

> My high school experiences were gateways for my initial success as a Black male at this PWI. As a scholarship recipient with an internship component, I fully understood the investment that had been made in me. I was motivated and dedicated in fulfilling my obligation to those individuals that had invested in me. Often times than not, I was one of three Black students in my engineering program…which had been normalized for me throughout my academic journey. I learned to embrace and use my Blackness as an asset by engaging in dialogue with faculty, students, and staff unapologetically about mostly any topic. The respect I received created opportunities for me to be invited to events where I was able to network and build relationships with a cohort of allies that motivated

and supported many of my endeavors on campus. One of my most rewarding experiences was serving as the B2B Chapter president from 2014 to 2016. My mantra: Black male students at any institution in higher education are not a monolith. It is important to value equity, inclusion, and diversity within society in general but also within the communities of people of color. Our voices are important if we want to invoke change.

Mister was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly White high school in middle Tennessee. He had a sibling that attended this university. After touring the university and spending time on the campus, he felt it was the university where he could leave his mark. The most valuable lesson that he learned was the importance of understanding why this university would set him on the trajectory of being successful. He stated that answers he retrieved from his "WHY" is what helped him to achieve his academic goals at this PWI. He elaborates:

> The value of a college experience is to recognize the importance of building relationships in the classroom and outside of the classroom by being curious and engaging, even if you find yourself surrounded by a majority of people that do not look like you nor share your same value system. Your curiosity will open so many doors and provide you access to many resources that you might not otherwise be aware of. My role as co-founder of the B2B chapter was challenging and rewarding. Mentorship requires much sacrifice, commitment, and dedication. You will have many losses, but your wins make it worth the journey. My involvement with B2B was why I stayed and graduated from this PWI. I have and will continue to share these lessons learned with others as I pay it forward as a husband, father, and competent leader in my professional and personal life. My mantra: Developmental mentoring that is intentional and effective can be

liberating and empowering when you are open to unlearning so many untruths in our American society.

Scott was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly Black high school in west Tennessee. He wanted a unique experience that would provide him with an opportunity to be exposed to experiences he felt he would not have had at a HBCU. Despite withdrawing from the university during his sophomore year due to financial hardship, he returned and graduated in 2017. The most valuable lesson that he learned was that he can always turn lemons into lemonade. Scott describes his experiences:

> I would not have survived the college experience without the support of the B2B mentoring program. You see I had a financial hardship that included food and shelter insecurities during my academic journey. It was the brotherhood that provided psychological and spiritual support along with some financial support during these challenging times. As a Black man, it is hard to trust other men (especially those of another color) with your vulnerabilities and shortcoming because you fear judgement and rejection. The members of B2B exposed me to a world that I did not know was real. I travel out of state for the first time with these brothers… (Sigh). I had the opportunity to meet Black men that were CEOs of companies, authors of best -selling books, doctors, lawyers, and professional athletes that shared how they overcame adversities in life similar to my hardship which motivated me to not give up. I did graduate from this PWI…eventually I moved out of state for a period of time, only to returned back to this community to intentionally support Black boys through the gift of mentoring. My mantra: Do not be afraid to ask for help, maximize using resources that are provided for you, and never, I mean never give up because only you can hold yourself accountable for your life and future.

The narratives of the participants that attended and graduated from this university from 2010 to 2022 provide an illustration of how their Black identities and awareness impacted their student development experiences at this PWI. Mentorship from a developmental focus support the scholarly work of theorists, such as Chickering (1969), Chickering and Gamson (1987); Cross (1991); and Helm (1993) who purport that student traverse through various stages of mature development on a college campus.

**Group 2. COVID-19 Participants**

Lamont is currently a senior attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly White high school in west Tennessee. He was offered a full football scholarship at this university. He decided to leave the football program in his senior year so that he could focus on his program of study. He described how devastating it was when the pandemic occurred in March 2020. He stated the campus was like a desert. He was confined to his room and struggled with mental health issues. As a result of COVID-19 contact tracing, he had to return home for 12 days. Although he enjoyed the online classes, he missed the social engagement that he felt was critical to his academic success. The most valuable lesson he learned was that when trials and tribulations come in your life that you are not alone when you have a support system. Lamont describes his experiences:

> As I reflect on my experiences before COVID-19 and during COVID-19, I am grateful for the support of the B2B advisor who has been so supportive. I am currently serving as the B2B President and proposing that we continue to have a hybrid form of mentoring that will include virtual and on campus events. I have had many challenges during the pandemic that I had to turn into opportunities. One of those opportunities was becoming a member of one of the Black Greek male fraternities in 2021. Because I extended by academic program for another a semester, it allowed me to have the available to meet the

> criteria for the Black male Greek fraternity. I credit the B2B program for providing me a sense of belonging in a safe place that not only validated my academic success but my professional and personal aspirations.

Payton was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly Black high school in middle Tennessee. He had a full scholarship at a historically Black university. Still, he opted to attend this university because of his desire for a more diverse population that would offer him different experiences. COVID-19 had a significantly negative impact on his last year in college. He missed the opportunity to have a "normal graduation." At first, he struggled with isolation but learned to adjust. He is enormously proud of himself for staying focused and graduating in spring 2021. The most valuable lesson he learned was to take advantage of opportunities in life by demystifying fear. In Payton's own words:

> There were times that I regretted not attending a HBCU because I struggle with the cultural and social anxieties at this PWI. Once I started engaging with faculty, staff, and students as a result of my involvement in B2B, my confidence in my abilities were restored. As president of the B2B chapter, I was determined to continue the legacy that had been established. COVID-19 was unchartered territory for the chapter. We held a few virtual meetings but were unable to host the major social events that we had sponsored in 2019. Moving forward, I am confident the B2B advisor has the wisdom and fortitude in sustaining the program as he has been at the helm since its inception in 2012.

Davon was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly Black high school in Tennessee. He chose this university because he wanted different experiences and to get away from home. Because of his deep connection with his family, he wanted to be within a reasonable driving distance if needed in an emergency. He was disappointed that his mom and sister were unable to attend his graduation in spring 2020. He also

felt that his career opportunities had been limited because of COVID-19. During the timeframe of this interview, he had returned home and was not working in his field of study. His desire is to secure employment once the COVID-19 situation is under control. The most valuable lesson that he learned was that he would never give up on his dreams. Davon describes his experiences:

> My experiences pre-COVID was like night and day from what the experiences were during COVID on campus. I basically was in a state of depression, feeling isolated and unproductive. You see as a social being it was extremely hard. I recognized my Blackness when I met with a White male therapist that tried to be helpful but just could not relate to what I was going through. I thanked him for his time after our second virtual session. If it had not been for the B2B advisor, I would have lost my desire and motivation to graduate. He communicated with me frequently via text messaging and also had some of the other brothers reach out to me via text messaging. In turns of resources, the university accommodated me so that I did not have to struggle with food and housing insecurities. The campus also provided me with adequate internet, a pc, and academic software programs. My mantra: When you make a promise to a body of people that have encouraged and supported you on a journey, the last thing you want to do is to disappointment them no matter how hard the struggle is, it is important that you stay the course and complete what you start, failure is not an option.

Justice was a first-year student attending a PWI in Tennessee after graduating from a predominantly White high school in west Tennessee. He received a full band scholarship at this university. Although COVID-19 was an unexpected occurrence, he chose to stay focused on his coursework and was intentional about graduating in spring 2020. He stated it was a distraction that he could not afford to give into. The most valuable lesson he learned was how much he

enjoyed mentoring and will continue to pay it forward in life. Justice elaborates on his experiences:

> In the midst of the global pandemic, I learned the importance of adaptability. As president of B2B, musician, photographer, mentor at a middle school, and academic scholar, my plate was full. I would not have traded any of these experiences because I learned how to pivot, declutter, and value the true meaning of what brought me joy. I was fully aware of my Blackness on campus and understood that I was at a university that depicted me as a minority with limited resources. I entered with the mindset that I would maximize every potential opportunity placed before me. As chapter president of B2B, I was effective in growing the membership and sustaining the visibility that the founder and co-founder had left as a legacy after they graduated. I regret leaving business unfinished as it related to increasing the funding formula for our organization and advocating for hiring more qualified Black faculty and staff. It was one of the most rewarding experiences of my academic journey to serve in leadership on the B2B Executive Board and also as a leader with my Black Greek fraternity. My mantra: Black students on any college campus should intentionally seek a strong mentorship and or leadership program for academic and professional growth, specifically programs that provide equitable opportunities (including resources) for you to be successful in life.

The narratives of the participants that attended and graduated from 2020 to 2021 provide an illustration detail account of how their Black identities and awareness impact their student development at this PWI was slightly different than their pre-COVID brothers. The delivery of the mentorship format from an in-person format transitioned to a virtual format requiring some modifications but still operated with a development focus that supported the scholar work of some of the same theorist, Chickering (1969), Cross (1991), and Helm (1993).

## Success Stories

All students were first-year students in their initial enrollment at the PWI in Tennessee. Eleven of the students graduated between the years of 2014 and 2021. The twelfth participant is on schedule to graduate in May 2022. Five of the graduates obtained bachelor's degrees in engineering. Four of the graduates received bachelor's degrees in business. A bachelor's degree in communication was awarded to two of the graduates. The student scheduled to graduate in May of 2022 is pursuing a degree in criminal justice. Eleven of the participants served in leadership roles on the B2B Executive Board. Eleven of the participants served in leadership roles in a Black Greek male fraternity. Overwhelmingly, the students were consistent in centering the mentorship program as the hallmark of their college experience at this PWI. All students credit their participation in the B2B Peer-led mentorship program as the cornerstone of their success. Education has been described as the great equalizer in America's society. Normalizing Black male achievement provides a process for educational practitioners to critically think about how the integration of the counter-narrative tenant of CRT from theory to practice can close the achievement gap of the under-represented minorities in our society, especially Black males.

## Themes and Sub-Themes

For data collection and organization, the students' stories were categorized into themes based upon the five research questions. The themes illustrate the students' experiences in a mentorship program including institutional practices that contributed to their persistence toward academic progress and graduation. The majority of the themes and subthemes identified as answers to the research questions and aligned with those in the literature review, there were new themes that emerged from the data that has been brought forward as well.

### Theme 1: Early Intervention

- Retention and Graduation Initiatives of the PWI
- Student Orientation
- B2B Chapter's Organizational Structure

**Theme 2: College Experiences with and without B2B (Student Development)**

- Campus Culture
- Faculty Engagement
- Social Climate

**Theme 3: Experiences in the Mentoring Programs**

- Mentorship activities: virtual, peer, institutional, and intentional
- Effective Mentoring: developmental, same sex & race mentoring
- Characteristics of Mentors

**Theme 4: Promote or Obstruct Success**

- Sense of Belonging
- Safe Space
- Brave Space
- Real Talk
- Vulnerabilities

**Theme 5: Practices, Strategies, and Policies**

- Campus Influencers and Resources
- Fraternity Membership
- Networking
- Community Involvement

- Social Capital

**Research Question 1**

How do Black male students attending a PWI in Tennessee perceive key initiatives of a formal peer to peer mentoring program that may have contributed to their academic success?

Themes that emerge from this question included were the PWI's retention strategy, student orientation, and the B2B organization's structure. As consistently illustrated in literature, peer mentoring has been positively related to students' academic success (Brown, 2009; Cuyjet, 2006; Collier, 2016; Druery & Brooms 2019; Quigley & Mitchell 2018; Wood & Palmer, 2015). From the onset, Black males in this study brought with them an interest in a college experience that would prepare them for success. Following initial introductions for the interviews, my first inquiry to each student was, "Please tell me about B2B and how it contributed to your academic success?" As the comments below illustrated, these students were intentional in seeking an organization that would provide them access to staff, faculty, and resources that would help them succeed on a PWI, recognizing early in the process that they were the minority on this campus.

***Early Intervention***

Research has shown that mentoring plays a significant role in retaining Black male students (Cuyjet, 2006; Eakins & Eakins, 2019). In 2011, this PWI sought the support of Black male students attending the university under a Student Affair practitioner's leadership in re-imagining a mentorship program different from the mentoring programs in the past. With the support of the Chancellor of the PWI, some funding by the PWI, and networking with the founder of the Student Association of African American Brotherhood, Mr. Tyrone Bledsoe, the B2B Organization was established at this PWI in 2012.The B2B Organization leadership team consisted of the founder, co-founder, B2B advisor and an executive board team. The leadership team designed the organization's structure with the intentions of fulfilling the mission of the PWI

which was to improve the enrollment and retention of Black male students at this campus. As a backdrop to the retention strategy, Chief, the founder (first president), recognized the racial climate and social injustice that his Black peers had been traumatized by the killing of Trayvon Martin and that his killer, a White male amateur security guard, was set free. This happened during his first year, 2012. He elaborated:

> I said to my roommate Mister, "man that could have been you in this situation or me given our lived experiences in our home community." Let us try to help our brothers understand this madness by inviting them over to our pad to talk and get our minds right around this trauma. Chief agreed with Mister.

Mister collaborated the story that Chief had shared:

> I agreed with Chief, and we invited some guys over, which this would later become the cornerstone for our authentic "rap sessions" of our B2B Meetings on Tuesday. That following week, we meet with Dean Jones (pseudonym), the assistant director of Student Affairs, and consented to join him in a meeting with Mr. Bledsoe, the founder of SAAB…which resulted in this PWI giving us an opportunity to participate in their design of a Black male mentoring program specifically for Black male students.

***Student Orientation***

Eakins and Eakins (2019) research recommended that PWIs use the Student Orientation platform as a resource to provide opportunities for Black male students and their parents to learn about student organizations and out-of-class activities that will support their academic success. As a student orientation intern for three years at this PWI, Mister strategically used social media as a marketing tool to promote the B2B organization as a resource for Black male students to seek out when attending student orientation. The B2B organization had a welcome table at each orientation. Chief's description of the strategy:

> Mister and I learned from the upper-class students that one of the best recruitment tools for Black males is to catch them when they first arrive on campus; the earlier, the better. At the time, most Black students were engaging with each other through social media outlets, like Facebook and Twitter….so it was easy to get the word out to the Black students attending the PWI [Laugh].

Mister said, "Most all Black students, including both females and males, knew about B2B before they arrived at the PWI…it was an easy sale because we were the only Black male organization on the campus outside of the Black male Greek fraternities." Our program is free with no strings attached other than a commitment to attend the meetings and fulfill the written Promise Agreement (Appendix B).

Chief elaborated:

> Under my presidency, we had a membership of 50 to 60 mentees in our peer-led mentoring program in regular attendance at our weekly meetings and the major events we sponsored on and off campus. The collaborative efforts we established with other organizations was one of the keys to our success. It was great to see the camaraderie that occurred among the diverse student engagements. One thing for sure that I learned is our generation just enjoy hanging out and having an enjoyable time…it really did not matter about your skin color, sex, sex orientation, or any of that. Relationships were established early, resulting in access to a group of students who freely shared information about resources on campus, told you how to gain access to key departments and staff people, and most importantly provided guidance in how to select faculty members academically solid in their disciplines and cared about you as a student.

Justice shared:

I needed to make sure I maintained by academic scholarship, so I intentionally sought out to join a Black male-centered program at this PWI…although I found out about B2B through my twitter feed from a classmate attending this PWI that was an upper classman, it was not until my parents, and I attended Student Orientation that I realized it was the only Black centered male organization other than the Black Greek fraternities. As a first-year student, I would not be in position to even consider the initiation process for a Black Greek fraternity until much later in my academic experience…Immediately, I wanted to be affiliated with B2B because I had experience that sense of community at my high school as a member of a similar Black male group.

Lamont had a similar story:

I had been on the campus during the summer prior to my enrollment in the fall as a result of my football scholarship. All the football players were required to attend the six-week Summer Bridge program. I have to say that I was not feeling the campus at first because our engagements were with predominantly White faculty and staff…you see I wanted a different experience but one where I could engage with Black guys and not just those guys that were my teammates. I just did not want "dumb jock" to be my identity at this PWI. I remember listening to an interview of one of my favorite basketball players on national TV, LeBron James, and having him to defend his intelligence when a White news reporter commented that he should shut up and dribble as if he did not have the same rights as she had in voicing his views on issues…Anyway, when I attended the Student Orientation and heard the hip hop music playing at the B2B Organization booth did I feel the connection to something I was familiar with…of course, I was impressed and later joined.

Tinto's (2017) study revealed that institutions should at the very outset of students' journey on college campuses should as early as student orientation if not before taking steps to provide a diversity of social groups and organizations that allow students to find at least one small community of students with whom they share a common bond.

### *B2B Organization's Structure*

The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) organization was founded on November 10, 1990, by Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe to address the academic challenges of African American males at Georgia Southwestern State University (Cuyjet, 2006). SAAB programs believe that the challenges facing Black males can be resolved by providing student development interventions and support to its participants (Cujyet, 2006). The founder and co-founder of the B2B Organization attended several training programs led by Mr. Bledsoe. Chief described the experiences:

> Mr. Bledsoe gave freely of his time, resources and provided me with guidance on how to develop a comprehensive training program for mentors and mentees. The lessons I learned from the training sessions helped me and Mister create a framework specific to the needs of mentees at our campus.

Cuyjet (2006) describes SAAB as one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing associations in the country structured to assist its members in excelling academically, socially, culturally, personally, and professionally. Additionally, the SAAB three-prolong approach to mentoring involves (1) peer-to-peer transactions among college students, (2) advisor-to-student transactions, and (3) the older student (collegiate) to young student (high school and middle school) transactions. Cuyjet (2006) concurred the basic structure of each chapter in the organization consists of six committees addressing (1) personal development, (2) service, (3) academic, (4) financial affairs, (5) spiritually enrichment/social, (6) membership/public relations.

A chair and co-chair heads each committee. Cuyjet (2006) stated the most critical and effective feature with the SAAB's model is the constant and supportive involvement of its advisors and mentors.

Mister elaborated:

> I was grateful that Mr. Bledsoe told us that we had autonomy in individualizing our chapter to meet the particular needs of the men on our campus. The uniqueness of our chapter was that it was not limited to just Black male participation it was inclusive of any male that wanted to attend and become a member. Unfortunately, membership over the span of my involvement was predominantly 99% Black male descendants.

However, we fully understood the value in having some commonalities that were unique to the SAAB mission…So we employed those three-mentoring approaches and the six basic structures in our chapter, which provided consistency, stability, and sustainability. We were determined to hold ourselves accountable to the core values of proactive leadership, accountability, intellectual development, and self-discipline. Each mentee had to agree to the terms of a promise contract before becoming a member (Appendix B).

To illustrate the mentors' commitment and dedication to SAAB's philosophy, Davon shared how he was so impressed with the structure that he immediately wanted to be involved in the organization.

> I had never in my 18 years been around a group of Black men that were this poised and determined to help other brothers without their being some strings attached. [Sigh]. This just blew my mind. I will never forget the sacrifices they made for me and others … their unwavering support was wild. Their motivation made me want to be better and do better.

Payton added:

> If it had not been for Dean Jones when COVID-19 hit, I would have withdrawn and returned to my hometown. The campus was like a desert. There was no social engaging at all. The most engagement I had was when I would go pick up my meals every other day. I also had to get a loaner laptop computer from the IT Department…but that was about it. My B2B advisor would call or text me to see how I was doing. When I was having a tough time with my therapist, who happened to be a White female, I went to his office. We practiced 6 ft. distancing and wore masks during our engagement. He told me to hang in there that we had gotten through the worst part, and he could see the light at the end of the tunnel...I told him I could too! It was just easy to talk to him. I felt like he could relate to me as a Black man. He motivated me to stay the course.

Tinto (2017) states that one of the key dimensions of a student's motivation is self-efficacy. His study describes how self-efficacy influences how a person addresses goals, tasks, and challenges. A keen sense of self-efficacy promotes goal attainment while a weak sense undermines it. Self-efficacy is the foundation upon which student success is built (Tinto, 2017). In this study, the SAAB founder and B2B advisor acknowledge the capacity of the mentors to provide quality and timely instruction, and guidance to the mentees by allowing them to have a high level of autonomy with the program design and structure.

All of the students in this study were first-time students with high grade point averages and seemly academically prepared for their first year. The one common denominator that I heard in the voices of all participants was early intervention affirmed this PWI had an interest in their success. All of the students credited their academic success to the early awareness of the B2B Chapter resulting from the PWI's support of mentorship as a retention strategy, first interaction through the student orientation program, and the B2B Chapter's leadership and organizational structure.

The backdrop of CRT revealed itself as a liberatory method of using the mentoring platform to share counter-narratives of how these Black male students pivoted from a deficit mindset of loss and disparity into hope and change. Trayvon Martin's death motivated Chief, the founder of B2B at this PWI, to use the mentorship platform as an instrument of positive change. Delgado and Stefanci (2001) state that CRT supports the unique voices of colors and argues that although not all people of color experiences are identical, they are collectively able to speak to issues that White counterparts cannot adequately address. Bonilla-Silva (2009) argues that White people use color-blind racism primarily to explain racial differences in ways that exonerate them of any responsibility. CRT framework encourages affirmation, support, and advocating for social justice and cultural competency (Delgado & Stefanci, 2001).

**Research Question 2**

How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive mentoring to their overall higher education experiences? A described by Sir, "My biggest hurdle was understanding that academic success has to be balanced with social and cultural engagements otherwise your academics will suffer."

Comments in this section depicted the participants' overall perception of their higher education and the role that mentoring played in navigating those experiences. The themes that emerged were (1) campus culture, (2) faculty engagement and (3) social climate.

***Campus Culture***

For this study, campus culture refers to the overall racial environment of the university setting. Responses to being Black on a PWI were varied with each student participant. Six participants described that despite their best preparations through campus visits, student orientations, and institutional assurance of an affirming and welcoming environment for all

students, their realities of life on a monocultural campus in the setting of a monocultural community shaded the actual campus climate they had envisioned.

Keep in mind; the consensus was the same by all participants when asked why you enrolled at this PWI, they all said they were seeking an experience that mirrored the real world that they would eventually live, play, and work. Six of the Black males that had matriculated from a predominantly Black high school described their first few weeks on campus as being a "culture shock" for them. Nineteen years ago, Tinto (1993) found that many Black students had difficulties transitioning from a secondary school environment to college. Interestingly, the six participants that had matriculated from the predominantly White high school described their emotional state of mind as being challenging but not overwhelming. Bear in mind that most participants had strong academic credentials and had been active as leaders at their various high schools. The difficulty of transitioning to the PWI was succinctly expressed by James who said, "This is an entirely different world for me than I thought…most of my life experiences from K through 12$^{th}$ had been at predominantly Black schools."

Five participants reported similar experiences who had attended predominantly Black high schools. They all described how they were kind of nervous and did not know anyone. They all said they felt like imposters on campus because of the influx of so many White students, faculty, and staff. Three of the participants described how they were planning to withdraw after the first couple of weeks. However, the shift came when they learned about the B2B Mentorship program and started attending the Tuesday weekly meetings. The support of their brothers, having a safe space to talk about their insecurities and vulnerabilities, and having access to resources like tutoring is why they stayed.

Mister and Chief described different experiences. Even though they knew they would be attending a PWI with a significantly low percentage of Black students, they were shocked and surprised to find more Black students on campus than they expected. Mister shared his reaction:

> The norm I had experienced was a total of three Black students in my class…like all through school…kindergarten through high school…me and two Black girls most of the time. Here…I was like…I remember calling my mom after the big Greek event and saying…Mom, it is like one hundred Black students on the yard…I was like…you do not understand…they are everywhere! I remember her saying, "I know this is going to be an amazing experience for you."

Chief revealed:

> I intentionally felt the positive vibes on campus because of my friendship with many of the upper-class students that my sister had introduced me too. So, in order to gain visibility…I dressed like my White counterparts and some Black upper-class students…in preppy outfits with nice sneakers… absolutely no sagging and sometimes wearing a shirt and tie…. Thus, I felt comfortable in my own skin and others around me respected my "cool" but distinct style. I wanted to demonstrate a culture of it being okay to be cool and smart as a Black male student at this PWI.

Lamont agreed, stating:

> I was surprised at how many Black people there actually were. The school is known to have one of the best engineering programs in the country. It did not phase me like, OK, this is the mountain in Tennessee…this is not an HBCU…I was like I can get the best engineering education just like anybody else. I had heard some things…places not to go…be aware of certain counties and areas….so I knew a bit of that, but I was caught by surprise with the number of Black students here.

Justice, an engineering major who was an exceptional high achieving student in high school who given a full academic scholarship at this PWI, explained:

> I struggled my first semester with support from my academic advisor in selecting the right mix of courses...It was hard to get help because faculty just were not accessible. Also, I was used to being one of a few Black males (sometimes the only Black) in many of my high school courses, but I always had support. Finally, after talking to my B2B advisor, he helped me with my class schedule for the remaining semesters until I graduated in spring 2020.

Samuel, an engineering major who was also a recipient of a full academic scholarship at this PWI, described a different experience:

> My experience was rewarding because of my exposure at my predominantly White middle school and high school. My mom kept me involved in STEM programs and academic clubs throughout middle school and high school…I was used to being the only minority. As a mechanical engineer, often times she would let me travel to conferences and meetings with her. The experiences she allowed me to share with her made me feel at ease when engaging and speaking with diverse audiences. I had to adjust to the rigor of the coursework, but that was easy after I figured out how to balance events in my social life.

Patrick described how racism and stereotypical behavior showed up at the PWI:

> I was nervous when I found out Donald Trump was coming on campus, the candidate running for President in 2017. I remember being on campus when President Barak Obama won the election in 2013…there were such angry students, primarily White. I attributed their anger to being "ignorant." At the time, my friends and I were rejoicing that we finally could be proud of the first Black man elected as the 44$^{th}$ President of the United States.

> However, nothing prepared me for the "hype" of White people when Donald Trump came on campus in 2017…White guys were running around with signs "Make American Great Again," …also driving around with their confederate flags. It was an uncomfortable and threating environment for students of color on campus.

Davon shared:

> One of my friends, which was a (RA) Resident Assistant, was called the "N" word with the long "R" by one of the White girls on her floor. I learned from my parents, who are devoted Christians that you have to forgive people of their ignorance…however, it was not acceptable, and I was not cool with it, but I had to help my friend get past it by setting the example. That meant, I could not retaliate but turn the other cheek, meaning just letting it go without reporting it to campus security and student affairs.

Payton elaborated on his experience while driving Black in the city:

> Me and a group of my friends, three of us driving back to campus after having dinner in the downtown area of the city. I slowed up when I saw that the police officer had pulled someone over, thinking that was the right thing to do. The police officer stepped in front of my car, which caused me to stop immediately. He said some very mean and harsh words…talking to me like I was stupid. He assumed me and my friends had been drinking. I had never been as scared as I was that night. When he finally let us go, we were just silent. I knew I was grateful that it was only our feelings hurt and no bodily injuries. I will never forget that experience. I shared my experience at the Tuesday B2B Meeting and found out that other brothers had had similar encounters in life. The consensus where it is an everyday occurrence that as Black men, we have to live with, realizing the most critical strategy is to comply so that you live to see another day.

James confessed that his expectation for a positive campus environment did not match the reality, and it caused him to question his self-esteem. He explained:

> That is an easy answer for me. No, I do not think this campus was inviting. It is not that I had an unpleasant experience…it is just at first, I did not know how to embrace the diversity of so many white students, faculty, and staff having come from a predominantly Black high school. Even the Black student organization does not meet the needs of every Black student. With us being so few and far between, it is hard to find common interests and common ground sometimes because we are all from various places. However, I felt welcomed when I started attending the B2B weekly meetings on Tuesdays in the UC. I will never forget the time a White male fraternity group wore t-shirts with a "cotton picking" design on it during Black History Month. They had to know that it was offensive…but when called out on it, they said they did not mean any harm. We discuss the incident at our B2B meeting…I remember one of the mentor's saying, "There are some people that do not know our history, they just are not culturally sensitive like that…we have to teach them."

Lamont contributed some heartbreaking examples:

> The culture climate for me shifted in March 2020 while I was at home for spring break. I just remember feeling devastated when I returned to a deserted campus…it was like a ghost town. As a football player, I was just beginning to get adjusted to not being the stereotypical "dumb jock" in the classroom by some of my professors and some of my peers. I recall the comment of one of my favorite basketball players, LeBron James, when a reporter told him to shut up and dribble when he spoke about social injustice…It reminded me that I play the game of football; the game does not define me… Also, to add insult to injury…one of my teammates tested positive for COVID-19, which resulted in

me having to go home for 14 days because of contact tracing. I went through depression and isolation…it was so boring to spend all my time in my room alone…. especially, after losing two relatives to death due to COVID-19 related medical issues. When I reached out for help [Sigh]…that was a huge disappointment….my therapist was a White female who could not relate to my level of stress…plus what she shared with me, I had already googled. My support came from my B2B advisor, who called and texted me throughout that semester and the semester moving forward. As a result, financial and mental health issues forced me to reduce my class schedule…I am currently on target to graduate in December 2021.

***Faculty Engagement***

The more interaction students have with faculty inside and outside the classroom, the greater their gains will be with student development and institutional satisfaction (Austin, 1993). Mister, the co-founder of the B2B chapter, describes his experiences:

> As early as elementary school, I recognized that having a relationship with my teachers was important. I observed how my father, who at the time was president of the parent teacher association engaged with the principal and all of the teachers. I understood that my way of learning sometimes was different from their way of teaching. I had a Black teacher who was a good friend of my father that taught me how to make the adjustment. Also, in middle school, my history teacher was a Black male that shared his individual experiences during Black history month with the class…for instances, he talked about Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, Martin Luther King, Langston Hughes, just to name a few influential Black men that influenced him. Fast forward, by the time I reached high school and became somewhat of a respected athlete and student government leader, I was one of the model students in the 5-A Black athlete mentorship program that instilled in us

> the importance of our attitude, actions, accountability in our academics, and athletics endeavors. The advisor of the mentor program scheduled regular one-on-one meeting with us and our teachers' one a week. During these meeting we got to know them on a personally level…most of them came out and support our home basketball games and even traveled out of the city with us. So, you see…it was an easy transition for me to have comfortable conversations with faculty and staff in leadership roles at the PWI.

Samuel described his experience in this manner:

> I had the opportunity to build good relationships with most of my STEM faculty. The missing puzzle was that it was truly little diversity in terms of faculty and staff in this program. Also, there were times when I felt like I was the "token" Black male that could address race related topics. I became extremely comfortable with that role. In fact, I maximized using it by encouraging other Black students to major in Engineering. As a member of two national engineering professional organizations, my professor assisted me with sponsoring a workshop that brought these two organizations on our campus providing an excellent opportunity for all students, especially Black students to engage in a networking event that encouraged career development.

Sir had a dissimilar experience than Samuel:

> At the start of the class, I thought I was cool with my professor…however, I learned very quickly that he was not as supportive as I had thought. I remember being totally disappointment and demoralized by his action when I turned in a paper 5 minutes late due to a medical emergency that I had. I fully understood the classroom rules and accepted his comment to me, when he said, "You are late and will not receive credit for this assignment in." …he said this at the start of class with all the students present. About 10 minutes later a white female student entered the room and placed her assignment in the

> designated area. The professor did a gesture with his head to let her know that it was okay. Accords, there were students that recognized the differences in his approach…excuse my language, but I was pissed. [Sigh], it really missed me up. I later spoke with my mentor, and he helped me to process what had happened and encouraged me to schedule a conference meeting with the professor…which I did. Basically, he acknowledged that he should have managed the situation differently, not realizing how it was perceived by me as well as others in the classroom. Toward the end of the semester, he nominated me to attend a tour of one of the new major distribution and sales facility that was going in the community. As an engineering major, it was an amazing opportunity for me to experience first-hand the robotics and other efficiencies in their processes. Fast forward, this same professor nominated me to work on the UTC's student rocket team. Our six-member team was recognized by the Chancellor and Mayor for our outstanding work. I was proud to be able to represent the legacy of other Black males in the College of Engineering and Computer Science.

***Social Climate***

According to Wood and Palmer (2015), a feeling of comfort in the social context is a precondition for psychological wellness and successful scholarly performance.

All of the participants attributed much of their persistence to their involvement with diverse campus activities and organizations. Collaborative engagements with the Student Government Association, Black Student Organizations like B2B, fraternities and sororities, cultural councils, academic councils, and honor societies kept them engaged. As most participants said, "Being involved…it's one of the things that has kept me here," and Sir wholeheartedly agreed:

> My academic success was a by-product of my social experiences at this PWI. I would also say that it was not so much the mentoring program for me but the social networking

that motivated me to persist and graduate. I loved that we could hanging out in the UC, listen to rap and soul music and kick it without being judged or told what we could and could not do. So, you see when I arrived on campus…I was seeking to build a coalition of Brothers that would be my ride or die for life...and I found that with B2B.

Justice stated:

> The social experience is what you make it…you have to put yourself out there and engage with people with diverse backgrounds and experiences than you. Although I needed the support of mentors and brothers that looked like me, I also realized the importance of surrounding myself with people of other races, ethnicities, and cultures…this was the college experience I was seeking. So, when I became President of the B2B Chapter, I had more opportunities to do just that. As President of B2B, the social experience forced me to set boundaries in my life…I had to learn how to balance all the freedoms of being a social butterfly with the demands of my academic major. Also, in my role I spent a lot of time planning, organizing, and creating the content for the social events…which was time-consuming and exhausting at times…I felt like I really could not relax and enjoy the events because I was so tired by the time the events were over…in thinking back, I wish the PWI would have provided more support services for B2B when we had the responsibility for huge events…sometimes we had well over 500 people (diverse backgrounds and experiences) at our social events.

Patrick described two events that were life-changing for him:

> B2B had a book club and invited the author to each one of the booking signings at two separate events, each titled "A Night Out with the Gentlemen." We had a really good turnout at each event. Enitan Bereola, II, author of two bestselling books, "Bereolaesque, the Contemporary Gentleman & Etiquette Book for Urban Sophisticate "and

> "Gentlewoman, Etiquette for a Lady, from a Gentleman' was simply amazing! As a writer, I was inspired and amazed to actual meet my protégé. It was important for us to promote our Black sisters and have him personally teach us on bereolaesque, the fusion of being a gentleman and being sexy. The belief that chivalry is not dead.

Silk shared:

> I was a social butterfly when I arrived on campus…thinking that by being social engaged would make me the "man' on campus…little did I know that it would reveal how immature and vulnerable I was at age 18. It is important to have upper class students to hold you accountable and remind you the social engagement is important to the college experience…but never lose sight of your real purpose, and that is to stay in good standings academically and graduate. Also, I was a strong advocate for social justice and wanted to support the Black Live Matters movement, but I reframed from being a vocalist for fear of how it might be perceived by the faculty and classmates in my communications classes. I felt guilty for having to make this choice [sighed].

Brooms and Davis (2017); Eastman et al., (2019); Gonslaves (2002) research suggests that institutions must work with White faculty and Black faculty in ways that promote self-reflection and self-awareness around racial issues if they want to understand the value in racial awareness in and outside of the classroom experiences for Black male students at a PWI.

**Question 3**

How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee describe their formal, peer-to-peer, and informal mentoring experiences? The themes that emerged were (1) mentoring relationships, (2) same sex and race mentoring, (3) characteristics of a good mentor.

### *Mentoring Relationships*

Mister stated from the onset, he, Chief, and Dean Jones were intentional in identifying Black males they felt understood the complexities of the Black male experience because of similar backgrounds and interests. The mentors selected served on the Executive Board and held positions as chairperson of the six committees: academic; personal; service; finances, social and spiritual; membership and public relations. Mister said, "I had been a leader in a similar style program at my high school, it was an easy transition for me…so I recruited the mentors and took on the training role." Mister explained:

> Chief and the Executive Board members assisted me with preparing the plan and program content that we presented at our regular Tuesday meetings. In my opinion, the role of a mentor is one of support to the mentee. Our mentoring philosophy was developmental in nature; focused on helping the mentees to realize their potential. The mentees were responsible for their learning, development, and setting the directions for their relationships. It became a reciprocal process in that the mentor in many instances gain as much as they mentee.

James described his role as a mentor:

> I learned so much about myself as I prepared to help the mentees. My confidence in myself improved significantly because I got constant feedback and encouragement from Chief and Mister. There were times that I did not want to go home on the weekend because I was so committed to helping the Executive Board create relevant content for our weekly meetings and plan for several major events. My shyness gave way to me being more vocal and sharing my ideas...because I had to speak a lot, my competency in public speaking improved tremendously.

Scott said, “I found out how much my mentors cared when I had to return home due to financial hardship.” He stated that all the guys that he spent time together with, texted and called him. He shared:

> I remember when I returned back to campus and had to go for a job interview, Mister said man I got your outfit together for you…Wow, for the first time I wore a sport jacket and dress shoes instead of sneakers. I felt so good about myself. Yes…I have to tell you that I went with the brothers to a SAAB meeting in another state. It was my first time traveling on a charter bus to another state. It was amazing… [Voice was high pitched and filled with joy.

***Same Sex and Race Mentoring***

The mentoring of Black male students by other Black males is essential to the success of Black males in higher education (Patterson, 2018). To be successful, Black male students need to identify with Black faculty and staff they can relate to that promote academic success (Palmer et al., 2010). When Black students have positive role models, it contributes to the learning environment (Palmer et al., 2010). All participants in this study implied that only another Black man could relate to stressors of oppression, depression, and discrimination that is normal in everyday life for Black males. Black mentors have the skills to help mentees learn how to be culturally responsive by allowing for a level of empathy and trust that is unique to the Black male experience.

Scott explained:

> Just about every brother I talked to had gone through some form of hardship like I had. You see, I know the difference between a good mentor and an evil mentor. Where I am from, most guys are trying to get you to smoke weed, sell drugs, and show no respect to no one, not even their mother...See, I know these guys on campus are the real “deal.”

Justice elaborated by saying:

> I had same sex and race mentors throughout my high school experience…so you see I knew that at age 18. I would not be able to navigate the nuances of college life at a PWI, especially knowing that I was going to be a minority on campus and in my engineering program…. And attending a school that was not culturally designed for people that look like me…therefore, I was intentional about joining the only Black male organization at this campus at the time of my enrollment…Later, I would join one of the renowned Black Greek fraternities.

Mister had a different mindset as he described his intentions with the same sex and race mentoring concept:

> The B2B Chapter differentiate from other SAAB Organizations by shifting its mission of being inclusive of all races instead of focusing on African American descendants only Mr. Bledsoe, the founder of SAAB understood and support our mission. However, as mentees started to join and participate, we discovered that our recruitment and retention efforts only generate interest with two of our Caucasian brothers who supported our events but did not attend the weekly meetings on a regular basis. They became allies for our chapter by supporting our organization in other capacities on and off campus.

### *Characteristics of a Good Mentor*

In this section of the study the participants provided characteristics of a good mentor based upon their experiences in the B2B organization. The themes that emerged were providing guidance, resources, empowerment, care, and accountability.

**Guidance.** All participants described the guidance as a predictor of a good mentoring relationship. Justice shared:

As an engineering major, I did not have an academic advisor that helped me until my fourth year. In my first year, I struggled because the department did not have enough faculty to help us with our schedule. I was at risk of losing my scholarship, so I went to my B2B advisor, and he helped me with my schedule for the subsequent four semesters. He also worked with the Financial Aid office and Bursar office in re-instated my scholarship…Even after I finally got someone that was helpful, I still would have myB2B advisor review it for accuracy.

Sir described an incident when one of his faculty members would not accept his assignment because he was 10 minutes late for class due to a situation beyond his control:

You see, I knew the rule about being on time for class, but it was a situation that I could not help due to a stomach virus…at least I was determined not to miss class. So, I opened the door and placed my assignment in the designated area. The professor said, “You know you are late, and I have to follow the rule and not accept your homework." I just dropped my head and said "OK." About 2 minutes later, my White counterpart, who was a female arrived late and put her assignment in the designated area. The professor acknowledged her and did not say anything to her. At first, I was mad but realized that it did not matter how he treated us differently; I was late and failed to meet his requirement. I told one of my brothers what had happened, and they listen patiently and helped me check my nerves. As my mentor, he gave me a strategy that I continue to use to this day… You may have lost that battle but did not lose the war...Moving forward, I was determined to ace this class. The long and short of the story is that I did get an A in his class and ended up receiving the outstanding STEM award that year.

Scott shared, "using your experience to guide and help someone else through theirs is a gift." He gave an interesting perspective on guidance and how mentoring can be good or bad for you by saying:

> I grew up around people in my hood who are mentored every day by guys who left school to sell drugs and recruit them to do the same, knowing that it is a path that will eventually lead to their destruction. I say this type of mentoring can kill you off...you see I know the difference because a mentor who guides you the right way will put you on the trajectory to success.

Justice shared:

> Mentoring provides guidance, resources, and accessibility. You know…as a mentor, it is rewarding to have someone willing to help so that you do not have to jump over and through some of the same hurdles they did

**Resourceful.** Resourceful was another common theme that emerged as a description of a good peer-led mentoring program. All participants described the academic and professional resume of the mentors they had was outstanding because they did what they were talking about. The mentors had the characteristics as well as the experience to speak on topics they had lived through. The mentors took the time and had the ability to provide a plethora of resources. James described:

> There were many times the mentees did not have the appropriate attire for formal meetings and interviews…Chief and Mister always had a supply of sports coats, dress pants, dress shoes, and ties in their closet that they would donate. Most of the time, if they did not have those items in their inventory, we would nickel and dime up [laugh] and go to Goodwill and shop for the brothers.

Scott shared:

> The mentors gave so freely of their resources. I remember a time I did not have money for books. I told one of the mentors…Wow, I do not where the money came from, but within a few days, the mentor gave me all the books and some supplies that I needed for that semester. The most beautiful thing about it was no one else even knew I was struggling like that.

Davon stated:

> The hidden gem on the campus was the B2B advisor. He was always accessible no matter what time of day or night if you needed him. He gave me his cell phone number and told me I could text him anytime. He was true to his word…. however, I only contacted him when I really needed his support. This was mainly during pre-registration for classes, he made sure I was in the right classes and selected the best professors for the courses that I had each semester from my sophomore until my senior year.

Chief described an incident that happened on campus with a group of mentees:

> Mister and I were roommates….so a couple of times, we invited a few of the mentees over for a house party just to kick it a little bit so that they could get to know us and trust that we would be there for them. So, a month later…I get a call around 1:00 a.m. and one of the guys was hysterical on the phone…he was saying that a group of them were together, and a fight broke out and the campus police came and questioned them. He said, it was not them that were fighting they were trying to diffuse the situation with another group. Mister spoke with the mentee and told him that he was on his way. Mister shared with me that sure he spoke with the campus police officer and shared with the officer in a calm demeanor, that he was their mentor and explained their story in a methodical way without all the emotions. The next day, the matter was dismissed, and the mentees did not have to go before the disciplinary committee.

Many of the mentors donated the necessities that the mentees needed to survive. Chief and Mister expressed how different situations would arise and as mentors they were determined to meet the needs of the mentee without negatively impacting their pride as Black men.

**Empowering**. All participants had stories of how they were empowered during their mentoring experiences. Mister shared a scenario about how difficult empowering can be when you must teach Black males to unlearn habits, they had been accustomed to most of their life. One habit was the perception of how women were being treated during that era. Mentors made it clear that women are to be respected and protected, not degraded, and taken for granted. Chief was an advocate in sponsoring and supporting the creation of a Black women's mentorship program at this PWI.

Silk comments were profound:

> My story will probably be different than anyone else that you will interview. You see, I was a member of the first Executive Board in 2012 and played a key role in the Chapter's inception…but because I failed to hold myself accountable to the promise contract and the organization's structure, I was the first to be suspended. It was devastating because I knew that I brought it all on myself by not keeping my grades up…you see I was wilding out because I thought I had it all figured out. Chief and Mister, called me out on my inappropriate behavior, failing grades, and brought it to my attention that my image was not reflective of the B2B mission and purpose. The looks on their faces when they had to have the hard conversation with me was worse than the suspension…. you see I had let these two people down because I did not want to listen and conform to rules. Interesting…they did not cast me out, talk about me behind my back to other brothers. What they did changed my life…all the brothers encouraged and empowered me as I was going through my transformation. It was by far the best mentoring experience I would

have in my adult life that prepared me for life after college…I learned that I had to be accountable for my actions because good, bad, or ugly…they have a lasting impact on your life. That form of empowerment resulting in a bond that has never been broken between me and my brothers. We still are in contact with each other. I believe we will always have a life-long friendships.

**Care.** Each participant highlighted one of the most beneficial aspects of the peer mentoring is the capacity to have more than one person, not only to care about your academics but also about your mental and physical well-being.

Davon explained:

> One of my mentors, who was the B2B advisor, was the reason I stayed in school during COVID-19. This mentor has always been there for me through good times as well as through challenging times from day one. I would describe my B2B advisor as the hidden gem on the campus…you see, I have always been able to count on him. He is a good listener, has a wealth of knowledge about life, and unlimited resources because of his reputation on campus...not only did he share the resources, but he also made sure that I used them. He texted me and continued to check on me from April 2020…even to this day.

Additionally, James divulged:

> All mentors in the B2B Chapter took the time to get to know their mentees likes, dislikes, and their "why." One mentor in particular… helped me to understand my "why" which helped me to build my confidence. He taught me how to navigate uncomfortable conversations in the classroom which increased my self-esteem as a person. I conquered my nerves and started to speak up and engage more in meetings. I also, learned how to not overreact to situations, especially topics that I deemed racist…he reminded me to stay

> calm, breathe, and speak with a non-threatening tone when I shared my thoughts and opinions. I was prejudging and forming opinions that I did not have substance to support…So when I look back and reflect, I had a lot of growing up to do. Being in this environment provided me with the capacity and tools to be a better man and leader.

**Accountability**. This shared belief amongst participants regarding the beneficial aspect of care led to the emergence of a subtheme that became a key term in every narrative of each participant. Being a member of the B2B chapter gave all the participants a great appreciation for accountability. Participants described accountability as not what someone does to you, but it is what someone does for you. Scott shared:

> Chief, Mister, Dean Jones, and the Executive Board were committed to their roles and did not waiver from their specific responsibilities…I also like that they were always accessible and never too busy to listen to me…even asking me about my personal life not just my academics.

Samuel described:

> The years I served as President was stressful but fulfilling...as Black men we are not a monolith…so it was important for me as a leader to meet each mentee where they were and help them to understand the consequences of all of their actions early on…realizing that each mentor had to play to his own individual strength. For instance, I recognized that Sir was more playful and charismatic than I was, so when the mentees wanted to just hang out and have fun, he took the lead. I on the other hand, was more focus on the content of the Tuesday meetings and want to make sure we adjust social and life issues…so as mentors we were characterized as actors that played our unique roles in the lives of our mentees.

Justice elaborated:

> The B2B Chapter provides a standard for all its members to adhere to; they expected you to perform in the classroom, they expected you to be a leader on campus, and most importantly they expected you to serve in the community.

The accountability component was equally important to the institution. As described by Chief:

> The Chancellor and his leadership team conducted monthly meetings to get updates on events happening in the multicultural center. We were invited and encouraged to share ideas. It was so liberating to be included in the decision-making process…so many of us had an opportunity in crafting practices and policies that impacted all students on campus.

Within higher education, mentoring is increasingly associated with efforts to promote student success, including helping students stay in school and complete their degrees on time (Collier, 2015; Kahle-Piasecki, 2015). Sixty-five percent of the public four-year colleges and universities included in American College Testing's "What Works win Student Retention" survey reported having peer mentoring programs with goals of promoting student success and retention (Collier, 2016). All participants in this study attributed that the B2B peer-led mentoring program to making them a better person, a better student, and a better Black man as they navigated the nuances of being the minority at a PWI. Druery and Brooms (2019) study confirms that all students in the B2B chapter believed that relationships through the Black male micro-community on campus was critical to their success.

Cuyjet (2006) suggest that as mentoring programs have evolved, so have the objectives and methods to address the specific professional and social needs of its participants, especially Black males. Bledsoe and Rome (2006) support his claim that mentoring programs that are developmentally focused are more likely to foster learning from an active mode rather than a passive mode which is more instructionally led. Bledsoe and Rome (2006) describe the SAAB

model of mentoring as a comprehensive mentoring paradigm that is developmental in nature that designed for Black males by enhancing their understanding of their responsibilities as United State citizens.

In analyzing the comprehensive mentoring paradigm of the SAAB model from a CRT analysis, one could identify the liberatory outcomes of how the mentees' individual stages of developmental learning as the mentee traverse through the various academic and social episodes of the mentoring experience obtaining by value skills such as critical thinking, self-confidence, how to counter the negative stereotypical behaviors of color-blindness and racism (Cuyjet, 2006).

**Research Question 4**

How do male students attending a White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive institutional practices that promote or obstruct their success and persistence to graduate? The themes that emerged were sense of belonging, safe space on campus, and brave spaces on campus, real talk, and vulnerability.

***Sense of Belonging***

Strayhorn (2018) states that what he learned since his reach in 2008, is that belonging does not require students to "fit in" or integrate or change themselves to assimilate to the norms, beliefs, and actions of others. With so much diversity, colleges serve as a perfect training ground for appreciating differences, learning acceptance, developing empathy, fostering inclusion, and learning from understanding. Scott's elaboration on his sense of belonging supports Strayhorn comments:

The B2B organization never made me feel like I did not matter, they made me feel like I was the greatest person walking on earth not just in their words but in how they genuinely showed how they cared…what I mean, is they supported me when I was struggling financially

and mentally, and had to return home for a semester…I remember Dean Jones told me that anything I deemed worth having was worth fighting to obtain it...I never forgot that. I was so proud of myself when I graduated in 2017. I credit the B2B chapter for my persistence to graduate. Justice stated:

> The PWI's institution practices did not obstruct my success and persistence to graduate, however, I felt that it could have done more to support the B2B chapter that single-handedly place Black males in a space mentally to persist and graduate. As President of the chapter, leading a new student organization, we were not funded to the magnitude of the predominantly White organizations that had been well established with an alumni base and many other sponsors that supported their organizations financially. Another area of concern that did not obstruct my success but I could see if enhancing the success for students in the future, is hiring and retaining more Black faculty and professional staff that care about the needs of the minority population on campus…Students need to know that it is just not only the Black or minority-based organization that care about them but the institution as a whole care not just in the mission statement but in how they show up. During COVID-19, I observed more care and concern during that time than ever before. Efforts were made to remove food insecurities, transitional housing for international students who could not go home, and I felt safe and secure with the CDC guidelines that were mandated by the university.

Strayhorn (2018) describes sense of belonging matters, and it is sufficient to drive human basic needs and behavior, as fundamental as air, water, food, shelter, and sleep.

Patrick elaborated:

> If I had not been engaged with activities through the B2B organization, I do not think my matriculation would have been as smooth. I cannot say there was obstruction but there

could have been more support by the university…for instance, just by bringing more awareness campus-wide as to the role the B2B organization played in their mission to recruit, retain, and graduate more Black male students…they were to silent and not vocal enough about the impact our organization was making.

### *Safe Space on Campus*

As participants reflected on their first transition from high school to college, they voiced an overall acknowledgement of the differences between their expectations and the reality of the experiences. Lamont and Payton had moments of panic because of the limited visibility of Black students, staff, and faculty they saw when they arrived on campus. They both described the culture-shock they experienced. Fortunately, it was not long before they connected with the B2B chapter and was introduced to more students that looked like them that socialized in the designated space. As result of those gatherings, they met more people of color that served as staff members that were supportive of their varies needs in financial aid, food services, campus parking, and student affairs that provided them with resources. In terms of Black faculty, although extremely limited, they were accessible to help these participants when needed.

All participants were elated that this PWI had a designated space for the B2B Chapter to have meetings, training sessions, workshops, and mini conferences. The B2B executive board members used this space as a meeting place to discuss how they would allocate funds to put on campus-wide events that generated revenues for the institution. The tone of these conversations were excitement and high energy. The satisfaction on each participant's face validated the having a safe space allow location of the appreciation they had for this safe space.

***Brave Space (welcome and wanted)***

Chief explained: B2B Chapter where meetings, training, teaching, and learning were held became a home away from home where I could be myself around people that look like me and shared similar values. The space that B2B physically and functionally had designated on campus, fostered a brave and safe environment for authentic and real talk. Payton stated, "Because this safe space was available it demonstrated an inclusive environment."

Nine participants stated that because they had this space, they could let their guard down and discuss openly ways to combat stereotypical comments in the classroom and information that was published on many social media outlets.

One participant described the immature behavior of students who intentionally wore t-shirts the week of Black History month that were offensive on campus with the attempt to stimulate controversy. For the most part, there were very few incidents of racial unrest that the participants were confronted with on campus. The subtle race issues were viewed as normal in this country and as well at this PWI. The twelve participants understood fully they were the minorities on a campus not originally created with them in mind.

Sir shared:

> What I loved the most about the space was that it was inviting and welcoming to all students. It was great to come in and hear the hip-hop music playing in the background, guys would be interacting with the ladies, and engaging conversations were going on…Man it was the best hangout on campus. Not only did we have a fun time just chilling… it was designated space that provided a safe and active learning environment and gave us a brave space to develop and find our voices. I can say my voice was strengthened through the engagements with highly intelligent Black male students who were high achievers.

Samuel said, “Success breeds success when you have adequate resources.”

### *Real Talk*

Mister shared that Real Talk was where networking, sharing o resources, learning, and teaching took place each week at the weekly meetings. Real Talk was where mentees developed negotiation skills, participated in collaboration activities, planned major events that produced large revenues of income for the institution, and shared skills on money management, photography, catering, music production, and entrepreneurship. Mentees learned how to dress for success, treat women with respect, and practice self-control in compromising situations.

### *Vulnerability*

Scott contended this space helped Black males to share their vulnerabilities and have extremely hard conversations about social and racial injustice. He learned how to combat macroaggressions in his life. This place allowed the mentees to not only show the campus who they were but that they belonged. This designated space sent a statement that they were welcome and validated that they were important on campus. All the participants stated that when you develop that keen sense of culture and self, it enables you to go and interact with people and love their differences.

Lamont responded with one word, “isolation.” Then he expounded by saying, “Most of the mentees were at least two to four hours from their hometowns, and the designated space resemble experiences you would have at home with family. Those experiences included familiar music, food, and conversations.”

Tinto (2017) states that students who perceive themselves as belonging to specific groups or the institution generally are more likely to persist because it leads to not only to enhanced motivation but also willingness to become involve and with others in ways that further promote

persistence. By contrasts, a student's sense of belonging, of being out of place, leads to withdrawal from contacts with others that further undermine motivation to persist (Tinto, 2019).

**Research Question 5**

What mentoring strategies, practices, and policies do Black male students recommend to institutions of higher education for addressing the academic success of Black males? The themes that emerged were campus influencers, faculty and staff of color, brotherhood, fraternity membership, networking, community involvement, social capital, and paying it forward.

***Campus Influencers with Resources***

Emphasizing the need to be proactive, all the participants described the importance of using campus influencers and the resources to help students obtain academic success.

Sir described his experience:

> The reason that I was able to successfully pass Calculus and other advance-level Math courses in my STEM major was because of the resources provided by the B2B chapter, faculty and staff in the STEM program, and my classmates. The thing is that students have to know about the resources in order to take advantage of them. You cannot be shy and not asked for help…for instance, I knew that I was struggling in my first math class, Algebra II because of the rigor of the college course for surpass that of my high school, therefore, I got with a study group of my peers in and took advantage of those resources.

Sir stated that he had to make a conscious effort and share with my professor that he was struggling, and the professor recommended the study group. Sir also was able to take advantage of the tutoring center as recommended by one of the B2B mentors.

Mister imparted the importance to build strong relationships in the classroom and outside the classroom: He shared:

> I learned from the upper-class students the value of engaging with all departments on campus from the janitor to the chancellor. The worst that could happen is to be told no by someone. It is worth the gamble to just ask. What I learned was that even if that person might not be available at the moment to continue to follow up with the person or the department in the future. I recall the time Chief and I want to travel to a SAAB Conference and take some mentees with us on a bus trip…our B2B advisor was able to work with the Vice President of Student Affairs to increase our funding that year so that we could cover all the expenses for the trip, simply because we described how it would be a great learning experience for mentees that had never met professional football players or Black business owners that were CEO's of their companies…These highly profiled individual shared their experiences of hardship and success with us.

Four of the participants shared the support they received from the Food Services Coordinator when they arrived upon campus during their first year just by having an association with the B2B chapter. There were members of the organization that had food allergies and were not aware that they could request a specific diet to address their dietary needs. Staff in Food Services intentionally made certain that participants' needs were met.

Several of the participants served as members of the Student Government Association. It was paramount that their voices be included when decisions were being made that related to policies and procedures that impacted all the students, especially students of color at the PWI. The B2B Chapter had a strong presence. In fact, one year the B2B Chapter was awarded the outstanding student organization award.

A key influencer was a reporter better known as an ally for the B2B chapter that continuously shared news articles about successful events sponsored by the organization with emphasis on many of the participants. News about specific members brought visibility to their

leadership, commitment, and dedication which affirmed the impact that the Black males were having at the PWI.

Ten participants acknowledged they had concerns about the percentage of people of color represented on the campus that they described as influencers. As they reflected on their program of study, of the faculty and staff they encountered that looked like them it was less than two percent. All participants attested that faculty and staff intentionally shared information about fellowships, scholarships, and job opportunities in their fields of study. Several professors wrote letters of recommendation for their participants.

***Brotherhood***

Overwhelming, the students in this study were consistent in centering brotherhood and the deep bonding experience that they shared with each other as the hallmark of the B2B chapter. Justice shared:

> Many of my best friends were in B2B and are now my fraternity brothers. An example of the strong bond is when you are traveling to a city where one of your brothers reside, you know you have a free place to stay and hang out and get familiar with the new atmosphere with your own personal tour guide [laugh].

Patrick described his experience:

> It is almost like, I was like a frat without being one; it is like a brotherhood without having obligations, such as [fraternities] requiring annual dues that you must pay. For me, it was basically a place I would go, have conversation with people who were going through some of the same things that I was going through and life in general. I had more than one brother that I could talk to about different struggles. So, it was kind of like having both a fatherhood as well as a brotherhood, depending upon my conversation.

Sir also spoke about the strong social connection:

> The brothers were the first people he partied with on campus. In most instances, it was the B2B chapter that sponsored the events. The social events were well attended by a diverse group of students, especially young ladies in a safe and protected environment. The social engagements really helped to secure my trust in the brotherhood. It was through the brotherhood that I developed a desire to become a fraternity member.

***Fraternity Membership***

Eakins and Eakins (2017) concur that historically Black Greek sororities and fraternities can help develop brotherhood and sisterhood initiatives amongst student populations. Eleven of the twelve participants were members of historically Black fraternities, thus solidifying the value of community of Black males at a PWI. The eleven participants concurred that their affiliation with the B2B Chapter during their first year prepared them for membership into the historically Black fraternities. Seven of the nine participants served in leadership roles in their designated fraternities. The double exposure on campus as both a B2B member and fraternity brothers created opportunities for the mentees to have more of voices that looked like them as well as having a presence in board rooms and serving on committees that raised their visibility on campus. The collaboration of Black organizations allowed the Black males to have influence and impact on what would soon be referred to as the "Little Africa" community that further made the PWI more receptive to the needs of the Black students.

Payton commented that from his observation:

> The PWI leadership team learned immensely about the needs of Black students through the engagements. The PWI members recognized that the collaborations with Black male students helped them to organically understand the need for equity for this population students. Five participants of the PWI executive board were B2B participants that shared how they maximized every opportunity given at meetings to educate academic leaders

and create spaces for more students of color, both male and female to be recognized for their accomplishments at this PWI.

***Networking***

All participants mentioned that one of the benefits of being a member of the B2B Chapter was the ability to network and make connections on campus and off campus. As one of the goals of the B2B Chapter was to increase the number of Black male graduates at this PWI, it was equally important for B2B members to find employment once they graduated. The ability to leverage program resources to open doors have been the experience of many of the participants. Davon recognized the value of being around a network of like-minded individuals. James said that it just helped aid and give me the drive to succeed. Sir stated that whenever I had an issue, I knew I had a support system of 35 to 40 guys that I could go to for help. Repeatedly Mister and Chief helped individuals stay in school just by having those connections.

Several participants used their membership in the program to make the right connections and to open doors that created tangible advantages in their career fields. Mister explained how undergraduate members made connections with B2B alumni for job opportunities. He stated that guys who already had careers were helping participants in B2B with their career aspirations.

Samuel was instrumental in bringing two professional engineering organizations on campus, the Tri-State American Production and Inventory Control Society to the PWI for a meeting so that Black students could take advantage of networking and career development opportunities.

James used the tutoring practices that he learned in B2B to develop a comprehensive tutoring guidebook for his internship program. The guidebook was used in the curriculum for first-time first-year STEM students in their introductory classes.

Samuel stated that the network aspect was beneficial because as an entrepreneur the partnerships and collaborations he had established in the mentorship changed the trajectory of his business model. He has been able to lean on his brothers and their experiences to help him establish strategic plans that have paid off in big dividends for his business.

Five participants credited the B2B Chapter for bridging the gap for them to obtain internships on campus and in the community. The mentors and mentees worked for well-known companies that included the Mayor's Office, Enterprise Rental, Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Amazon, Fox News, the State Department of Transportation, and this PWI in leadership positions.

***Community Involvement***

The Office of Equity and Inclusion at this PWI recognize the community involvement of the B2B Chapter in its support of the Annual Citywide Boys Leadership Summit. Each year the B2B Chapter supported the Ronald McDonald House event. The B2B Chapter collaborated with numerous organizations, including Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., Alpha Delta Phi Sorority, and Unique Perception in support of city-wide events that sponsored Breast Cancer Awareness, Martin Luther King Celebrations, and Hooping for a Cure events. Also, B2B sponsored events like A Night with the Gentlemen and the Battle of the Sexes that promoted unity and respect for women that added a new dimension to community and its involvement to support student success and diversity.

Payton was selected for a prestigious fellowship program funded by the city which was created to help the community where this PWI was located to become a city where diverse talent could prosper after college and thrive as professionals through opportunities for upward economic mobility. This competitive fellowship helped to elevate participants in community leadership roles and give them access to networking and learning opportunities. Payton was

recommended for the fellowship by the B2B advisor, an advisory board member. He stated that it was a rewarding experience. He had insights to the mayor's vision of more diversity in the community. Several other participants were fellows as well and expressed how this experience created social capital for them moving forward.

James described how his ability to code switch allowed him to take advantage of the community wealth concepts that heightened his awareness of how he showed up at community events prepared to resist stereotypes, combat micro-aggression, have cultural pride, and the ability to operate in multiple worlds (college-life, internship, family, and community.

### *Social Capital*

Six participants were members of the Chancellor's Multicultural Advisory Council and shared their experiences of how their voices and insights were valued at the Chancellor's roundtable as panelists discussing the social impact at the PWI. Chief described how the vision and mission of the B2B chapter aligned with the retention and graduation goals of the PWI. Mister's confidence allowed him to articulate the social impact of the B2B chapter at this PWI which resulted in additional visibility and more funding for the B2B organization.

### *Paying It Forward*

Volunteerism was an expectation for all members in the B2B program. The participants highlighted that paying it forward was personally gratifying but also a critical part of their collective experiences. The activities that participants completed while members of B2B and other organizations included visits to high schools, mentoring at middle schools, tutoring, meal giveaways, supporting breast cancer awareness, and clothing give away drives. Being a part of a larger mission to impact the community and others less fortune, enriched the B2B program experience for these participants.

Lamont discussed with passion the experience he had tutoring Black male boys between the ages of 10 to 12 that attended a middle school in the city that was close to a detention center:

> I was surprised when several students shared stories of hopelessness and despair, stating that they did not think that they would go to college or even live to be adults based upon situations that had and what was happening in their lives. I was able to relate to so many of their stories because I had lost two cousins to gun violence who lived in middle Tennessee within a brief time span during that year while attending the PWI in Tennessee. I knew that he could not change their circumstances, but he could make it fun, organically provide encouragement, and provide a glimpse of hope by talking to them about how he ended up going to college in Tennessee. I intentionally contrasted the opportunities that the university offer in comparison to the lack of opportunities at the retention center.

Wood and Palmer (2015) research describe the progression that higher education institutions have made in assuming some accountability and responsibility for student success. This model takes into account the contextual aspects of the institution (e.g., the institutional history, revenue streams, location, size, types); the action aspects (e.g., student success with programs, policies, practices, resources, structures, climates, partnership, and inquiry that provide high impact academic and co-curricular programming, policies that include academics and services (e.g., add/drop, withdrawal, work-study, institutional aid) and institutional policies (e.g., from a CRT perspective rules, regulations, codes created by presidents, chancellors, governors that may often times result in injustice and inequity (Lynn & Dixon, 2022), strategies (hiring, retaining, and advancing Black male personnel that include faculty, staff, administrators (Harper, 2006; Wood, 2014); outcome aspects (e.g., strategies designed to enhance outcomes for Black men that college leaders inculcating a culture of inquiry that engage in critical analysis of

data that are disaggregated to reflect outcomes for historically underrepresented and underserved students (Bensimon, 2005; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter contains the findings from twelve semi-structured interviews designed to elicit the participants' perceptions of the factors contributing to their success as well as insight into their lived experiences as members of the peer-led mentorship program designed specifically for Black male students at a PWI in Tennessee. After each interview, I made field notes and wrote down reflections associated with the research topic. This served to help me organize the data collection and analysis process. I transcribed the twelve interviews. I verified every transcription against the original to review for accuracy. I hand-coded each transcription after searching for emerging patterns, categories, and themes. The themes were organized based on the research questions. The first round of coding was done by searching for descriptive phrases. During this process I assigned phrases to a category. I read the transcripts a second time to determine if new categories emerged. I looked for emerging themes and patterns that allowed me to create subcategories. I reach out to four participants for more content on two of the sub-questions. I hand-coded each of those transcriptions and added the content to the emerging sub themes. I concluded data gathering when the data reached saturation during the fifth round of coding. In the final phase, I was able to identify the themes and subthemes most central to participants' perspective on the peer-led mentorship program's impact on academic success. I organized data into the themes and subthemes. I reviewed my field notes to acknowledge my preconceived notions and assumptions. All the participants provide quality narrative data to analyze and confirmed the accuracy of my findings.

The phenomenological methodology, informed by the CRT theoretical framework, sought to answer questions posed by the study and to highlight the voices and experiences of the

participants in the B2B peer-led mentorship program. The data supported several assertions about mentorship and its positive impact on the experiences of Black male students at a PWI within the context of CRT. These assertions are in five categories: (a) academic experiences, (b) cultural climate, faculty engagement, and social experiences(c) mentoring experiences, (d) institutional practices that promoting success (e) mentoring strategies and policies moving forward.

# Chapter 5. Conclusions

## Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how the mentorship program influenced the academic success of Black male students at a predominantly White public institution in Tennessee through their lived experiences. The first three chapters of this study covered an introduction to the topic; the background and significance of the study; the phenomenological approach to quality inquiry, theoretical framework; literature review, data collection, analysis process, and ethical consideration. In chapter 4, I explored the emerging themes and subthemes that addressed the five research questions and identified data from participants' interviews that expressed those themes. In this chapter, the problem will be restated, conclusions and findings from my research will be discussed, and implications for practice and further research will be given.

## Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was that there has been extensive research with focus on Black male students as under achievers in higher education. Also, there has been limited research on narratives as told by Black male students of how they successful navigated the nuances of higher education resulting in a positive impact on their academic success (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2012). The phenomenon of Black male students becoming high achievers at a PWI through a mentorship program was the purpose of this study's exploration by the researcher. Lynn and Dixon (2022) illustrate how terms like achievement gap, opportunity gap, and equity gap are used interchangeable in literature when descriptions are given to describe the deficit perspective of Black male students. This study sought to bring awareness to these terms and provide content that focus on the gaps in the literature that address Black male achievers through high impact practices like the B2B program. Programs like SAAB have been promoting Black

male achievement for more than three decades. This study has highlighted some of the best practices that have made Black mentorship programs structured with a developmental component effective. Because of my interest in mentoring and the positive impact it had played in my life, my husband's life, and in the life of our children, I sought to learn more about peer-led mentoring as a high-impact learning community in higher education, especially at PWIs in the southern region of the country. I was especially interested in the Black male experiences through the lens of the CRT.

**Discussions and Conclusions**

This phenomenological study was completed by conducting one-on-one interviews with 12 Black male students that participated in a peer-to-peer mentoring program at a four-year public institution in Tennessee. My analysis of each interview, as well as my examination of my reflexive journal, informed my identification of themes from the interview**.** These themes provided key answers to the research questions that guided the study. Conducting the study through the lens of CRT was challenging and liberating at the same time because it revealed the reality of racism disguised as deficiencies of the oppressed instead of a weapon of the oppressor to mute the voices of marginalized minorities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As described by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), "The voice' component of CRT provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice' (p.58). In this study, the liberation of the Black male students revealed itself through them embracing the color of their skin unapologetically through mentoring and teaching each other from their lived experiences as Black men. An additional advantage of CRT was the sanctification of the stories the students told as a powerful tool to challenge the status quo and contest deficit thinking and negative stereotypical behaviors at PWIs (Harper, 2012). The findings of this study could inform future practice in higher education policy makers, presidents,

administrators, and faculty on how to better engage and support Black male students in higher education, especially at PWIs. The findings could continue to add to the extant research the depict Black male experiences from anti-deficit framework providing more evidence of programs and resources that have been effective in closing the achievement gap for this demographic of students on college campus.

**Research Question 1**

How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive key initiatives of a formal peer-to-peer mentoring program that may have contributed to their academic success?

A number of salient findings emerged from the narratives of Black male students in their perception of the B2B program's contribution to their academic success. A primary contribution of this study to the greater literature on Black male students is they were aware of the power of their voices at this PWI and were intentional in creating their own opportunities to be successful early in their academic experience. Bailey and Bonner (2006) state that for Black students at PWIs, peers play a critical role because they help to facilitate a sense of belonging in an institutional environment that differs significantly from their cultural and social-economic background. The twelve participants in this study were in collective agreement that peers often referred to as brothers were the main reason, they stayed at the PWI and were motivated to persist to graduation. The uniqueness of this peer-to-peer mentorship was that it was strictly governed and led by peers. The B2B advisor concurred that full autonomy was given to the founder and co-founder to create a program tailored specifically for Black males at that university that was relatable to their lived experiences. The buy-in and commitment was shared by the members of the executive board. These findings were similar to those of Harper (2006) who found that participant's same-race peers helped to support, encourage, and validate their

academic success. Findings from Palmer and Gasman (2008) support the same analogy in this study, that relationships with like-minded peers, who were focused on succeeding academically, had a positive impact on the success of 11 Black men at an HBCU.

### *Early Intervention*

This study found that early intervention measures served as resources for students of color at this PWI. Participants in this study discussed the shared governance the chancellor of this university had in establishing an inclusion and equity program for Black male students to address the low recruitment, retention, and graduation rates for this demographic of students. One of the resources was hiring Black male students as freshmen orientation leaders and interns. As new students arrived on campus, especially Black males, they were able to engagement with highly visible Black men that looked like them who provided them with some intrinsic motivation and acceptance.

### *Student Orientation*

The Black male orientation interns that were members of the B2B organization intentionally marketed the B2B chapter on social media and at the orientation sessions as the "be all" organization for Black male students to join. They were encouraged to be active participants in sponsoring parties, raise awareness about issues that interested them as Black males, engage in stimulating conversations about world events, and discuss social issues happening in the world. More importantly, they were directed to a designated safe place on campus where they could hang out and be themselves.

### *B2B Organization's Structure*

The study revealed that the B2B organization understood that the earlier a culture of mentorship was built it created a sense of belonging among students that soon develop into the

right relationships at the right time that help Black male students persist through all types of challenges an adversity on a college campus, especially the navigation of a PWI. A recent study conducted by Mentor Collective contended that mentored students are 30% more likely to persist from term to term than non-mentored peers (Krusemark & Tew, 2020). This study also revealed that when upper-division peers (mentors) support their peers (mentees) there is a holistic success to the student engagement in terms of meaningful dialogue of academic and non-academic concerns of the participants (Krusemark & Tew, 2020).

**Research Question 2**

How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive mentoring to their overall higher education experience?

The twelve participants in this study sought a higher education experience at this PWI that would mirror the world in which they would have to migrate as they matriculate from college into a world in which they would work, live, and thrive. The campus culture, faculty engagement, and social engagement experiences of the Black male students were the focus in this study as they discussed their overall higher education experiences.

***Campus Culture***

Research continues to note how both race and gender stressors for Black male students at PWIs and how it affects their culture and social relations (Bridge, 2010; Fakunle & Smiley 2016). Six of the participants in this study who had attended predominantly Black high schools commented the following:

> Despite our best preparation through campus visits, student orientation, and the institutional marketing materials that offer an assurance of an affirming and welcoming environment, this was not the reality of their experiences on a monocultural campus in the setting of a monocultural community.

They described feelings of isolation, not fitting in, racist encounters, and a desired for an early departure from the PWI because of the poor institutional climate until they connected with the B2B organization. Interestingly, the six participants that had attended predominantly White high schools described some challenges but had experienced a level of conformity to being minorities on White campuses. Their level of self-efficacy had prepared them to pivot and bring awareness to the culture challenges they faced instead of burying their heads in the sand. Broom and Davis (2017)'s study supported these findings as this study identified peer mentoring as the catalyst used to help Black male students confront those challenges with peer mentors, advisors, and faculty that taught them negotiation skills (e.g., being mindful of their dress, behavior, and their presence on campus). In addition to being taught and learning negotiation skills, Black male students in this study learned how to internalize their peer-mentoring experiences, discerning what these experiences meant to their lives moving forward by translating some of their learning to proactive mindsets. These opportunities for growth, self-awareness, and resilience showed up as enhancement to cultural awareness they developed through their experiences. Druery and Brooms (2019) describe the benefits students gain when engaged in culturally enriched environments that promote positive relationships while building a bond of brotherhood for students.

### *Faculty Engagement*

Student-faculty relationships impact the classroom experiences along with the positive affect it has on student learning (Tinto, 1993). Baker (2013) suggest that faculty support is a fundamental determinant of overall satisfaction of Black college students more so than for White students. It is salient to have faculty of color available to ensure the Black students have a more positive experience at PWIs (Baker, 2013). Seven of the participants in this study described the overwhelming support they received from their faculty, predominantly White, inside and outside

the classroom. The twelve participants from 2012 to 2021 indicated that the average number of Black male faculty were less than 2% of the population of faculty they encountered at the PWI. The few faculty mentioned were supportive of the B2B chapter and were positive role models and change agents for the mentors and mentees at this PWI. Justice elaborated:

> The university leadership had unrealistic expectations for the few faculty of color that was on staff. From my interactions, they were extremely busy with the volume of courses taught and had limited time to help with extra-curricular activities that support students outside the classroom.

***Social Climate***

Broom and Davis (2017) content that adjusting to the social and cultural environment is identified as Black student success, especially at PWIs. From the theme focused on social engagement, students in this study discussed the role B2B played in enhancing their social life. Overwhelmingly, all participants in this study shared that there was a scarcity of social outlets on the campus that appealed to Black students. B2B's sponsored events were inclusive of all students. All participants credit B2B for developing partnerships and collaborations with other fraternities, sororities, and student organization that promoted social equity at the PWI. The Hiwassee Room was the designated space in the UC, where all students gathered for conversation, entertainment, and real talk. In March 2020, four of students in this study, as well as the world was faced with navigating life from the lens of a global pandemic, COVID-19. The complete shutdown for social engagement became real as we all faced the devastation of learning how to interact in a virtual world. As Davon described:

> The campus was like a ghost town…the lack of social engagement brought on feelings of depression, isolation, and affected my mental health.

Although members of the B2B Chapter used social media to engage the mentees (e.g., interactive games, exercising programs, and real talk) it was not sustainable due to conflict with class schedules and work-related obligations of the mentors. Krusemark and Tew (2020) shared that value of peer connection through mentorship during physical distancing can help mitigate social distancing from becoming social isolation.

**Research Question 3**

How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee describe their formal, peer-to-peer and informal mentoring experiences?

***Mentoring Relationships***

Mentorship is critical to the success of Black male college students (Broom & Davis, 2017; Cuyjet, 2006; Douglas, 2017; Harper, 2012, Strayhorn, 2017). These scholars concur that formal and informal mentoring provide support for Black males in a variety of areas (e.g., academics, social emotional well-being, and positive brotherhood). I am my brother's keeper, was the mantra adopted by the B2B organization as their expectation was that this would begin a cycle of never-ending support of Black males by other Black males. This platform was provided and supported by the Multicultural Affairs Department and was institutionalized under the Division of Student Affairs. Countless number of stories were told by the participants in this study to the respect they had for each brother and gave to each during their lived experiences at this PWI as they matriculated from recruitment to graduation and thereafter. This study like so much of the research that is most relevant in the 21st century (Harper, 2012; Broom & Davis, 2017; Ford & Collings, 2021; Ford & James, 2022) acknowledge the voices of Black males on college campuses and take notice of what these males are saying and how they see the world. President Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* (White House, 2015) provided another framework for the B2B organization structure. The grass roots level approach used in President Obama's

initiative gives voices to Black males and information through these young men to help higher education institutions value and validate their uniqueness by listening to their voice as they inform practices and policies on college campuses, especially at PW

**Research Question 4**

How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive institutional practices that promote or obstruct their success and persistence to graduation?

***Sense of Belonging***

Oswolabi (2018) describe a sense of belonging as a sense of fitting in; being in a group, a community, and membership in an organization acceptable from all other members of the group. For these students, the B2B Chapter's identified was grounded in a philosophy built on belonging...where you could be your authentic self and demystify the "imposter syndrome" mindset. One of the most critical components of this study as described by the twelve participants was the bond of belonging, they all felt they shared with each other. However, most of the participants in this study indicated that the institution did not obstruct their success but could have done more to make them feel a sense of belonging. This study reveals the progression that peer mentoring programs are making in identifying interventions in addressing the isolation that Black male students have felt for so long on predominantly White campuses. Strayhorn (2018) states that true sense of belonging is about finding oneself, living authentically, creating community amongst those who accept people for who they are, as they are…flaws and all. Tinto (2017) concur that students who perceive themselves as belonging to a specific group or the institution generally are more likely to persist because it leads to not only to enhanced motivation but also willingness to become involve and with others in ways that further promote

persistence…by contrasts, students' sense of belonging, of being left out, leads to a withdrawal from contacts with others that further undermine motivation to persist.

### *Safe Space on Campus*

All the participants in this study understood that the Hiwassee Room in the University Center on the campus was their safe space physically, spiritually, and mentally**.** They were appreciative of the institutional role in designing a safe sometimes referred to as brave space for marginalize students, especially students of color, to engage organically without fear and judgment. College leaders concerned with positive outcomes for all students, including Black men should ensure that resources are allocated to build institutional capacity (Huerta & Dizon, 2021). A true marker on institutional commitment in a given area is the degree to which that area is resourced (Wood & Palmer, 2015). This study reflected the PWI commitment to marginalize students, especially students of color on this campus by providing a brave space for the B2B organization to meet weekly, conduct workshops and training unique to the Black male experience, a place for vulnerabilities and insecurities to be address with trained and qualified mentors, and a place for fun, relaxation, and environment conducive to a home away from home. One of the participants in the study eloquently stated the safe space had both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, in that you were protected in a physical space as well as psychologically, spiritually, and emotionally thus supporting his persistence to graduation.

### Research Question 5

What mentoring strategies, practices, and policies do Black male students recommend to institutions of higher education for addressing the academic success of Black males? During the interview, the themes emerged were mentorship integration in communities, networking, social capital, and paying it forward.

### *Mentorship Integrated in Communities*

Black male students in this study recommended the continuous use of this style of learning community for all students but especially students of color. They recommended the value of integrating the mentorship program into communities that could bridge the gap in breaking down barriers for not just a few Black male students to matriculate through the higher education process but to empower, encourage, and support many more. The emphasis on accountability throughout this study was paramount in building a culture of mentorship on college campuses. The study revealed the importance of heightening the awareness and support of institution leaders, their direct involvement, and engagement in the public support of the programs like B2B as well as the adequate funding for the sustainability of these programs well into the future.

### *Networking*

In their college experience, the participants engaged with peers in a variety of ways that included fraternities, sororities, student organizations, student government, community functions, local government, fund-raising projects, social and health related sponsorships. The participants in this study were fully entrenched in the Black community as well as the overall campus community and others were inspired to follow them. Throughout this study, participants described how the B2B organization and the reputation of its membership open doors and created opportunities for them as well as for their brothers.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital involves features of social life inclusive of a network of people and institutions which provide support, nurturing, and trust that enable students to pursue shared objectives (Yosso, 2005). Social experiences and network of people that engaged with these participants substantially impacted their development and resilience to graduation. The

emotional, psychological, financial, and spiritual resources that had been extended through the peer-to-peer mentorship program prepared the way for their success. In return, they felt obligated because of the network of people that had invested in them. As Silk describe:

> Even, after being suspended from the B2B organization, the social capital which consisted of so many resources were still shared with me. My brothers kept me from dropping out of college and helped me to hold myself accountable, enabling me to see opportunities that I could not see for myself, and impacting how I navigated life on and off campus…at 26, I now see the vision they that had of me when I was nineteen.

***Paying It Forward***

Dunston & Rizzo (2021) describe a culture of membership is where every student has the right relationship at the right time. The twelve participants in this study collectively agreed that their experiences of being in the right relationships and the right time in their lives motivated them to persist and graduate. The positive impact of the mentoring program and other opportunities they were afforded fostered a desire to pay it forward. Justice described the outpouring of support and resources he as a mentee in his high-school mentoring program that prepared him for the rigor of the college experiences. He sought this experience when he initially arrived on the PWI campus as a first time (freshmen). He shared:

> Even with the demands of my academic schedule, participation in band, and leadership as President of the B2B chapter, I was committed to mentoring a group of middle school students in the community. B2B paved the way for me to become an intentional and effective mentor through the varies training programs…there was no way that I was not going to give back to a program that had given so much to me for most of my life.

Lamont described how his experience as a mentor and tutor for a middle school program that was across the street from a detention center in the community of the PWI solidify his major in criminal justice.

Chief and Mister sought the guidance and support of upper-class students and used the SAAB model in the design of the B2B Chapter at this PWI. The model emphasizes mentoring Black men from a developmental approached by enhancing their understanding of their responsibilities as United States citizens (Cuyjet, 2006).

Wood and Palmer (2015) state that mentorship can be a key strategy for success; however, this only likely to occur when an institution is committed to providing resources to programs that include financial, intellectual, and human capital assets at the disposal of the institution. From the perception of the participants in this study, the institution's support of the peer-to-peer mentoring program with identifiable and useful resources reflected the mentoring strategies, practices, and policies that foster academic success.

**Implications for Practice**

The participants in this study described institutional practices that promoted or obstructed their persistence to graduation. Their stories illustrated the impact of all levels of the university community from their lens as participants in the B2B peer-to peer mentorship program as well as students in general on the campus of a PWI. The narratives depict their total educational experiences with the administration, faculty, staff, and the community. The peer-to-peer mentorship program was the gateway that created opportunities for ten of the participants to engage with student-centered administrators, including the chancellor, who took the time to meet with them, listen to their ideas, and empower them to contribute to the development of an institution support developmental peer to peer mentorship program. This within itself demonstrated a genuine concern and care for their academic, cultural, and social contentment.

The participants who established a positive relationship with the university's leadership personnel expressed the positive impact it had on their overall experience.

Although the majority of the participants described their students' relationship with faculty as positive, there were some concerns with the lack of faculty of color. Several expressed frustration and disappointment with faculty members who demonstrated stereotypical attitudes. The majority of the participants shared their appreciation for and significance of supportive faculty relationships to their academic progress and persistence.

Overall, the B2B Mentoring program was most often mentioned as being central to recruitment and retention of Black males on campus. In addition, the designated safe space that provided a sense of belonging, social engagement, and active learning were most critical to their academic success. These participants were appreciative of the empowerment they were given to think critically and be active participants in the positive outcome they intentionally desired for themselves and their peers.

In terms of recommendations to improve the retention, quality of the college experience, retention, and graduate rates of Black students, specifically Black males it is recommended that administrators, faculty, and staff collectively work to develop programs like the B2B learning community, services, policies, and strategies that help to close the achievement gap for Black students that would lead to the ultimate outcome, student success. To that end, effective strategies must address the needs of students inclusive of the overt and covert racism and racist behaviors that exists at PWIs.

The Executive Leadership administrators should actively engage with all students and especially students of color in particular to assure they are responding to efficiently and effectively to their needs. Data collected for this phenomenological qualitative study provided evidence for the following list of recommendations:

- Institutions should consider the peer mentoring program as a high impact practice for recruitment, retention, and graduation initiatives for marginalized populations (especially Black males).
- Institutions should consider identifying safe spaces designated for marginalized students to interact and engage with other peers that will foster a sense of belonging.
- Partner with K-12, community colleges, churches, Boys and Girls clubs, and Black Greek organizations to strengthen the pipeline in recruiting more Black males to attend higher education institutions.
- Build collaborations with programs like SAAB, President's Obama My Brother's Keeper Alliance, The Education Trust, and Mentor Collective that provide resources that support Black male achievers.
- When recruiting faculty and professional staff, intentionally consider targeting universities with diverse populations in order to increase the number of Black male employment in higher education.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

My first recommendation is that studies like this one be replicated. Although this study has revealed progression in the Black male achievers and adds to a rich body of scholarly work from many in the field of CRT (critical race theory), DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), BMC (Black male collective programs), there is still much to learn about successful Black students within the context of higher education through a phenomenological research design. More scholars should be seeking to add to the body of knowledge that highlight the authentic voices of Black male students and recognize their creative, innovative skills, and gifts they bring to both their educational environment and the field of mentorship, leadership, and research.

The participants in this study have provided a number of directions to pursue. Further study is merited that would closely examine how the global pandemic has impacted mentoring programs in higher education specific to marginalize populations, specifically students of color. Also, while the participants in this study represented a select geographic location, the students' perceptions of their high school experience carried over into their college experience. A narrative study that examines the comparisons and contrast between predominantly White high school resources and predominantly Black high school resources could yield a greater depth of understanding of the Black student adjustment to diversity, inclusion, and equity opportunities on a college campus. A deeper dive into how Black males is not a monolith. Black males have many identities and higher education institutions must understand how to meet them where they are in their pursuit of being high achievers. A study on the role of White faculty and administrators as they engage with marginalized students (especially Black males).

Most recently, Lynn and Dixon (2022), describe how much the world has changed in the last eight years and at the center of the conversation is CRT as a critical lens of analysis for understanding and ultimately transforming our society, its laws, and its school systems. CRT is needed now more than ever. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character that is the goal of true education."

Lastly, because accountability emerged as one of the important themes in this study, more questions should be asked about the accountability of the institution, leaders, faculty, and staff. Higher education institutions must take into consideration the importance of culturally responsive curriculums; hiring more faculty and staff of color, specifically Black males; increasing funding for Black organizations like the B2B mentoring program, and scaling the

mentoring program for more participants, inclusion of more Black males in addition to including Black females in a peer-led mentoring program.

There is much more to learn about how institutional of higher education perceive the role and responsibility in high impact practices, specifically mentorship programs for people of color.

**Concluding Summary**

This chapter concludes the study that includes the introduction, statement of the problem, general discussion and conclusion, research questions, implications and recommendation for institutional practices, and recommendations for future research. In summary, this study sought to bring awareness to normalizing Black male achievement through the practice of peer mentorship that had implications for predominantly White campus in Tennessee by infusing the theories of CRT to practice that may have a positive impact on future strategies and policies in higher education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The Impact of Mentoring in Closing the Achievement Gap

for Black Male Students at a Predominately White

University in Tennessee

**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**PART 1- INITIAL/FIRST CONTACT**

**Instructions: Contact will be made with each of the participants by email, telephone, or messaging on social media. The initial contact will be as follows:**

*Dear (name): My name is Patricia Harlan, and I am working on a dissertation on the impact of mentoring in closing the achievement gap for Black male students at a predominantly White university in Tennessee. I would be honored if you would agree to an interview to discuss your experiences as a member of the Brother to Brother (B2B) Mentoring Program at the University of the South. I am particularly interested in the key initiatives of the Brother to Brother Mentoring Program that addressed academic success for Black male students. The interview may be conducted through and recorded through Zoom, over the phone, or through other methods that are convenient for you. Please let me know if you are interested in being interviewed.*

Upon agreement to take part in the interview, arrangements will be made to schedule the interview at a time and through a method convenient for the participant.

**PART II: THE INTERVIEW MEETING**

**Instructions: Upon convening the interview meeting, each participant will be read the following statement:**

*Good morning (afternoon, etc.) Thank you for coming. This interview involves questions about the impact that the Brother to Brother (B2B) Mentoring Program, may have an impact in closing the achievement gap for you while attending the University of the South. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore how the Brother to Brother Mentorship Program influenced the academic experiences that you as a Black male student had at a predominately White institution in the southern region of the country. There are no right or wrong answers, and you may decline to answer any question or take part in this interview. I want you to be comfortable and state what you really think and feel.*

**Recording Instructions:**

*If it is okay with you, I will tape record this interview. The purpose of tape recording during this interview is so I can capture the details while also carrying on an attentive conversation with you. Because of the small number of participants and the specific events discussed, I cannot guarantee your comments will remain confidential; however, you will have the opportunity to read over any statement or view attributed to you before the final dissertation is published.*

**Consent Form**

*Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read this consent form, and sign it if you agree.*

## PART III. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Interview Questions

**Interview Date: _____**

**Pseudonym: _____**

**Background/Demographic Questions:**

1. Tell me about your family.
2. Are you still enrolled, if so, what is your enrollment status?
3. Are you a graduate, if so, what was the date of your graduation?
4. Why did you choose this university?

(Q1**): How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive key initiatives of a formal peer-to-peer mentoring programs that may have contributed to their academic success?**

(Q1a): How would you describe the effectiveness of this university in addressing your academic needs through the mentoring program?

(Q1b): Describe your experience as a Black male student at this university?

(Q1c): Tell me about your needs as a Black male student at this university.

(Q1d): Why did you choose to participate in the B2B Mentoring Program?

(Q1e): What are some of the features of the B2B Mentoring Program that interest you?

(Q1f): Are there any other important insights you would like to share about your experiences in the B2B mentoring program?

(Q2): **How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive mentoring to their overall higher education experiences?**

(Q2a): Describe what it is like to be a Black male student on a predominantly White campus?

(Q2b): Describe the racial climate at this university?

(Q2c): What did you enjoy the most about your social experience at this university?

(Q2d): What did you enjoy the least about your social experience at this university?

(Q2e): Describe your culture experience at this university?

(Q2f): Do you feel like your culture differences were welcomed at this university?

(Q3): **How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee describe their formal, peer-to-peer and informal mentoring experiences**?

(Q3a): What led to the development of the mentoring relationship between you and your mentor?

(Q3b): What do you consider the most important characteristics and qualifications a mentor should possess?

(Q3c): Was the mentoring sessions valuable to your success at this university?

(Q3d): Was it worth your time and investment?

(Q3e): Did the relationship with your mentor have a significant impact on your decision to stay in school? If so, describe how your mentor affected that decision?

(Q3f): What did you learn about yourself as a person through your involvement in the B2B mentoring program?

(Q3g): Did the race of the mentor have an impact on the mentoring experience or the growth of the relationship? If so, describe how race impacted the relationship. (Q3h) What benefits were gained from your mentoring experience (if any)?

(Q4): **How do Black male students attending a predominantly White four-year public university in Tennessee perceive institutional practices that promote or obstruct their success and persistence to graduation?**

(Q4a): Describe your experiences when you first stepped on this campus. What were your feelings about the campus environment?

(Q4b): What resources were available for you when struggling academically or personally, if any?

(Q4c): What events or activities contributed to your persistence at this university?

(Q4d): Describe the institutional practices such (policies, programs, services) that promoted academic success and persistence to graduation?

(Q4e): Describe those institutional practices (policies, programs, services) that obstruct academic success and persistence to graduation?

(Q4f): Describe your experience with faculty and staff at this university as a whole and in your academic department?

(Q4g): Describe your experience with your advisor?

(Q5): **What mentoring strategies, practices, and policies do Black male students recommend to institutions of higher education for addressing the academic success of Black males?**

(Q5a): What mentoring structure and practices would you recommend to improve the academic success, cultural experiences, and social experiences for Black male students at your institution?

(Q5b): How can your institution learn more about the support and needs of Black male students?

(Q5c): What institutional practices and resources do you believe are critical for student success?

(Q5d): What recommendations do you have for increasing recruitment, retention, and persistence to graduate for Black male students at your university?

Disclaimer: Interviews will be semi-structured, meaning these questions may not be asked verbatim and conversations will be allowed to flow in a friendly style. The investigator will be led by the subject into areas that might not be touched upon here, but that will remain within bounds of minimal risk.

## Appendix B: A Promise to My Brother

As a promise to my brother, I undoubtedly pledge to you, to be both your keeper and your friend for those kinds are few. I pledge to hold you accountable in life and academics and cross the finish lines of life with you and to exclaim we did it. I pledge to serve with you at least three meetings out of the month, I pledge to remain a gentleman to the core never to be used a front. I pledge to maintain no lower than a 2.5 GPA and always aim to reach 4.0. And encourage my brothers to do so as well. I pledge to serve our community and work for the greater good, while others sat by and watched, I pledge to be proof that we stood. I am my brother's keeper and together we shall rise, I will forever keep my brother, so our bond never dies. My charge is to save lives and salvage dreams, always carry myself with the highest demeanor and hold both myself and my brothers to a higher standard; I pledge to be the epitome of all these things. I promise to never intentionally breach this contract and solemnly swear to graduate alongside my brothers within 5 years and continue to live the Brother 2 Brother way long thereafter.

Signature X _____

# VITA

## PATRICIA WAIRE HARLAN

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|---|---|
| Education: | Ed. D. in Educational Leadership, 2022: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN |
| | M.A. in Organizational Management, 1991: Treveca Nazarene University, Nashville, TN |
| | Certified Purchasing Management, 1988: University of Wisconsin, Online Program |
| | B.B.A. in Business Administration, 1982: Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN |
| | A.A.S. in Office Administration, 1980: Columbia State Community College, Columbia, TN |
| Professional Experience: | Director Testing Services, Student Affairs, Columbia State Community College, 2018-Present |
| | Coordinator of Testing Services, Columbia State Community College, 1992-2017 |
| | Test Administrator, Columbia State Community College, 1990-1992 |
| | Adjunct Faculty, Business & Technology, Columbia State Community College, 1999-2003 |
| | Purchasing Agent/Collection Officer, Columbia State Community College, 1982-1990 |
| Certification: | Mental Health First Aid USA Certification: National Council for Behavior Health |
| | Apple IPad Certification: Tennessee Board of Regents Project |
| | Chief GED/HiSET Examiner Certification |
| | American College Testing Certification |

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| | College Board Testing Certification (ACCUPLACER & CLEP Administrations) |
| | Pearson Vue Test Center Director Certification |
| | H & R Block Tax Associate Certification |
| | Center for Non-Profit Management Faith Based Grant Writing Certification |
| Publication: | Maxine Smith Fellows, "At Your Fingertips, The Impact of Mobile Devices on Student Services and Engagement," 2015. |
| Honors & Awards: | Tennessee Board of Regents Maxine Smith Fellows Leadership Graduate |
| | Leadership Maury County Graduate |
| | Grant Writer: Tennessee Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church |
| | Project Manager: Tennessee Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church |
| | Outstanding Professional State Award for Columbia State Community College |
| | Columbia State Professional Staff Spotlight Award |
| | Outstanding African American Christian Women's Award |
| | Outstanding Girl Scouts of America-Group Leader Award |
| | Tennessee Achieves Mentor |
| | Tennessee Department of Education Award-Outstanding Test Center for Disabilities Resource Programs |