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ABSTRACT

We add the required preliminary pages for you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Education is a fundamental element in fighting poverty and raising the socioeconomic status of individuals in this country, particularly between working-class and middle-class status (Baber 2012). Therefore, the lack of education in many urban communities of lower socioeconomic status can be detrimental for those communities, as individuals trapped in poverty are exposed to being trapped in communities plagued by various issues, including drug addiction, violence, and crime. Higher education has then come to represent a way out of lower socioeconomic statuses. However, the barriers that come with being impoverished can possibly threaten a young student's chances of obtaining a college degree. Students from lower socioeconomic statuses are consistently at a disadvantage in the college application and transition process (Wells & Lynch, 2012). Students of low socioeconomic status, particularly Black students, historically deferred enrollment in college upon graduating from high school because of their financial hardships (Rowan, 2007). Despite these barriers, driven and determined students from lower socioeconomic statuses still recognized the importance and value of a college education and many pressed on to enroll. The enrollment of students from lower socioeconomic statuses was further enhanced by the creation of many access programs in higher education. In addition to these access programs, federal student financial aid has increased the number of low-income students who have access to higher education over the last 50 years.

Since the Civil Rights Movement, access to higher education has grown tremendously for African Americans, especially at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). By the start of the millennium 87% of all African Americans enrolled in post-secondary education were attending a

PWI (Baber, 2012). However, access to higher education for Black students does not necessarily equate to success in a collegiate environment. There are barriers for Black students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, that make the completion of a baccalaureate degree more difficult for these students. Despite increasing enrollment for Black students at PWIs, establishing relationships, acclimation, and campus engagement continue to represent difficulties for these students, especially when compared to their White peers (Baber, 2012).

This achievement barrier is illustrated more vividly among Black males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds at predominantly White institutions, as they have the lowest graduation and retention rates among their White, Hispanic, Asian, and Black female counterparts. Black women outnumber Black men on college campuses by a margin of more than 2 to 1, representing the largest gender gap for any racial or ethnic group (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Nationally, the 6-year graduation rate for Black males is only 34% (Kena et al., 2015).

Many of the studies conducted on Black males at PWIs have examined the negative experiences of this population with emphasis being placed on how impactful racial battleground fatigue is (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Racial battleground fatigue is the psychological, physiological, and emotional distress that arises from racially aggressive conditions or environments (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). While racial battleground fatigue is a real barrier that these Black males face at PWIs, it is not the only issue they encounter. Whether social acclimation, academic preparedness, or financial setbacks, there are a host of barriers that Black males from lower socioeconomic statuses face. Furthermore, addressing these barriers tends to result in methods and best practices that provide social support, remediation, and financial

support for these students, in an effort to achieve academic success via retention, matriculation, and graduation (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

While success for Black males at PWIs should be explored through these methods of intervention, there is one in particular that should be looked at thoroughly: resiliency. Resiliency can be defined as the ability to maintain progress regarding the physical and intellectual well-being following challenges the individual faces (Ryff & Singer, 2003). Mastin (2001) offered another definition of resilience with an emphasis on good results despite the presence of severe danger that threatens adaptation or progress. Mastin (2001) also provided criteria for an assessment of resilience:

1. The individual has to face a significant challenge or threat that has the ability to produce a negative result or outcome.
2. Resilience has to also be based on the presence of a good outcome despite the threat.

Thus, resilience is related to sustainability in adverse situations, and the belief that outcomes will still be good and favorable even when the circumstances and situations are not (Das & Arora, 2020). Though the phenomenon of resiliency is a trait that an individual possesses, the fostering and development of this trait can serve as a method of intervention, particularly for black males at PWIs. Houston et al. (2020) found that the resilience of high-achieving black males living in a high-poverty urban community allowed them to achieve academic success despite their middle school being under-resourced. These students overcame both institutional and curricular barriers by adapting and learning to leverage the relational and organizational resources available to them to promote and achieve positive outcomes (Houston et al., 2020). If the trait of resilience is something that has allowed Black males from lower socioeconomic statuses (LSES) to navigate the adversities of their secondary educational

experiences, it is worth exploring the role resilience plays in the experiences of these students in their post-secondary educational experiences, especially at PWIs.

Similarly, the concept of “grit” as a factor for student success has emerged over the last decade. Grit is defined as the student’s ability to consistently persist in the midst of struggles (Duckworth et al., 2007). Studies have shown that first-generation college students have had an increased level of effort, a factor associated with grit (Hodge et al., 2017). We also see that grit has a positive impact on the grades of Black males at PWIs and adds incremental validity to other factors of academic success (Strayhorn, 2014). Resilience has played a major factor in Black males from inner-city neighborhoods avoiding many of the pitfalls that plague those communities. Black men in Harlem in the 1990s were less likely to reach the age of 65 than men in Bangladesh, which happened to be one of the poorest countries in the world (Smith et al., 2011). For those that defied those odds, their mental toughness and ability to bounce back from setbacks and pitfalls were necessary. Therefore, it is worth exploring the role resilience plays in the success of those same Black males who come from those environments and attend PWIs and the barriers they perceive they face there. If resilience assisted these Black males in conquering a concrete jungle they called home, it must be able to help them conquer the ivory tower they now call school and, in some cases, their new home.

Vignette: My Personal Journey

As a Black man from the city of Trenton, NJ, a city known for its poverty and violence, resilience was part of my survival. It was the necessary ingredient in my recipe for success. However, my peers and I did not know what resilience was, as it was not a term taught to us; we just recognized and understood, through instruction and experience, that we needed to bounce back and be mentally tough in order to survive and thrive in our neighborhoods. It was not until

college that the concept of resilience was formally introduced to me, though it had been a trait that I had possessed, allowing me to matriculate successfully through my elementary and secondary educational experiences despite the many adversities that my educational institutions presented to me.

I entered a predominantly white institution through a state-funded opportunity program for New Jersey residents designed to provide academic and financial support to individuals from low-income backgrounds. The program, born out of the discourse of the Newark Riots of 1967, is known as the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program. To secure the EOF grant, students had to participate in a 5-week residential program on campus, in which students took college-level courses while also taking a course geared solely towards collegiate acclimation. Collegiate acclimation was going to be extremely crucial for my peers and me, as most of us had been raised in predominantly Black and Hispanic communities and were now embarking on a journey to obtain a college degree in the midst of two giant hurdles; we were first-generation college students at a predominantly white institution. While we were very much cognizant of these two aforementioned barriers, we had no idea that the EOF program was going to equip us to overcome them by utilizing a weapon we already possessed: resiliency.

The program, via its counselors, workshops, programs, faculty, and peer mentors, tapped into the resiliency we possessed and used it to motivate and encourage us. There was an understanding amongst EOF students that we have survived everything from poverty, violence, abuse, neglect, and even drug-addicted parents. Therefore, being the first in our family to attend college or being one of the few who looked like us on that campus were not excuses for failure. Moving away from deficit models and moving towards highlighting the positive narratives of the Black male experience, even at a predominantly white institution, helps to foster success (Bates,

2017). My resilience led to me not only overcoming those barriers, but flourishing in the process the same way it allowed me to overcome the barriers of my household, community, and K–12 educational experiences.

Leadership was stressed highly within the EOF program, so I became a student leader. My leadership process mirrored that of the Black Male Leadership Emergence on Predominantly White Campuses (BMLEPWC) model (Moschella, 2013), as I was offered a community with fellow Black students, and gained a sense of identity as a black leader on campus while also identifying threats or obstacles towards my emergence as a student leader. I served as a peer leader for the EOF program, worked as a tutor for my major, served as the vice president of the Unity Club, President of the Black Student Union, and founded the Multicultural Student Leadership Institute (MSLI). MSLI was important as it allowed other students to understand the importance of diversity and not just a singular experience of looking at the world through the lens of their own individual identities. Cross-cultural dialogue and participation have a positive effect on how black males at PWIs view their collegiate experience (Neighbors, 2016). As a result of my leadership experience and resiliency, I found myself receiving both my baccalaureate and graduate degrees from this predominantly white institution despite the perceived barriers I faced, which included systemic racism, discrimination, and exclusion.

As a former EOF professional at a large predominantly white institution and a current EOF professional at a small predominantly white institution, both in the state of NJ, I deal with students on a daily basis who fit the same profile I did as a college student. These similarities include financially and academically challenged backgrounds, first generation college students, and resilience. Just as the EOF program at my institution relied on that intrinsic force that students possessed to help them achieve success, so do the institutions today, which reflects my

fundamental belief. Throughout the state of New Jersey, EOF programs have retention and graduation rates that either match or exceed those of the university itself, despite the challenged backgrounds EOF students come from and the issues they bring to college with them. While many other opportunity programs have tried to replicate the success of EOF programs, especially with first-year students, what is often overlooked is something that this opportunity program does quite well: fostering resiliency amongst its students. Other factors for Black male success are also supported. Black male bonding is a significant aspect of Black males succeeding at PWIs (Jackson & Hui, 2017). Acclimation for Black males at PWIs must also take into account their awareness of self, as self-identity and efficacy, has a correlation with the academic success of these males (Reid, 2013). Black male leadership programs, both those run by students and administration, are also key factors in Black male success at PWIs (Barker & Avery, 2012; Simmons, 2013). As the coordinator of the Male Leadership Academy at my institution and the advisor of a student organization for Black and Hispanic males, I am aware that these leadership programs definitely help. Despite the aforementioned factors and indicators of Black male success, it is worth exploring the role resiliency plays in the success of first-generation Black college males who attend PWIs and the barriers they perceive they face there.

Theoretical Framework

Vincent Tinto's interactionalist theory of college student departure has been considered the framework in higher education when explaining student departure. Tinto's original theory of retention theorized that social integration into the campus community increased the likelihood that students would stay and thus graduate (Tinto 1975). Then Tinto (1993) identified three major sources of student departure: academic difficulties, no resolution of academic or career goals, and the ability to socially integrate with the campus. Other aspects of the theory looked at

the background and influence of the student's family and the academic preparedness of the individual before college as factors in why the individual student would depart.

The gospel of Tinto's theory is not without criticism though, particularly as it relates to marginalized populations, including students of color and more specifically Black men at PWIs. For some Tinto's social integration is merely social assimilation and thus cultural suicide for minority students at PWIs (Tierney, 1999). Throughout their collegiate experiences, Black males have consistently been urged by higher education professionals to assimilate into the dominant culture, and assimilation was viewed as the best way to socially acclimate. Furthermore, the theory's heavy emphasis on integration, socially and academically, does not fully capture the experiences outside of this that influence a student's decision to leave (Simmons, 2013). The responsibility of both the student and institution to ensure social acclimation undermines systemic and structural imbalances that make that acclimation more challenging. Tinto's response to these criticisms has resulted in numerous revisions of his theory. Tinto (1993) identified students of color, low-income students, transfer students, and adult students as unique groups of students with unique experiences that require methods of intervention specific to those groups. New recommendations by Tinto still centered on integration, with the university now bearing the responsibility of integrating these students. Colleges and universities must integrate students, on all levels, with the culture of that institution (Tinto 1993). However, the culture of these institutions at times represents the greatest barrier to integration and thus must be addressed as well. Racism continues to be an issue in higher education even in the twenty-first century (Critical Race Theory in Higher Education, 2015).

Subsequently, the emergence of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education has allowed another theoretical framework to be employed to address the shortcomings of theories from the

likes of Tinto. The theory, which asserts that the law and the legal institutions are inherently racist and that race is used by whites to further their interests at the expense of people of color, was introduced to higher education by Landson-Billings and Tate (1995) to highlight the experiences of people of color at PWIs (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2015). The theory has been used to examine the achievement gaps in higher education between Black men and high-income whites (Lopez et al, 2018) which once again goes beyond the concepts of integration and social acclimation highlighted by Tinto.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the role resilience plays in Black males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds successfully overcoming perceived institutional barriers during their years of attendance at a predominantly white institution (PWI).

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceived barriers at PWIs that require resilience from low-income Black males?

RQ2: What role does resilience play in how low-income Black males at PWIs see themselves overcoming the barriers they face at these institutions?

RQ3: How Is resilience among low-income Black males something fostered through Educational Opportunity Fund programs there that serve low-income students?

Assumptions

There are several assumptions at work for this study. It is assumed that all participants in the study are students who have been verified to meet the income eligibility requirements for the EOF program. Participants had a basic understanding of what resiliency is, whether in theory or in application. Participants also could identify times in their lives before college when resiliency

assisted them in overcoming an obstacle or accomplishing a goal. Finally, participants had come to college with preconceived notions of how the collegiate experience for them as Black males at a PWI would present challenges or difficulties.

Significance

Findings from this study may support the notion that resilience is effective in helping Black males overcome barriers, cultural or otherwise, at predominantly white institutions. Furthermore, the study may support the role opportunity programs at these PWIs play a crucial role in helping these Black males use their resilience as a tool for success. This study also provides recommendations for educators at PWIs on best practices for fostering resilience through institutional efforts and programs among its Black male students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Limitations

There are several limitations that should be highlighted in this study. This is a qualitative research investigation, so generalizations about the experiences of all low-income Black male students and their college experience at a PWI cannot be made or concluded from this study. There are also other factors or experiences not mentioned in this study that may serve as variables in the overall persistence and graduation of these students. These factors include academic majors, learning abilities/disabilities, and high school academic profiles. Information about these areas are highlighted as they are mentioned in the data collection process.

Delimitations

Due to the substantial number of potential participants who would self-identify as “low income” in the study population, the current study focused only on Black males who entered the selected PWIs through the Educational Opportunity Fund Program, an access program for NJ

residents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, the experiences of other Black males from LSES who are not in opportunity programs like EOF were not represented in this study, even though these students are facing the same institutional barriers and challenges.

Definition of Terms

Predominantly White institution (PWI): Institutions of higher education where 50% or higher of the student enrollment is White. These institutions are also known as Historically White Institutions (HWI).

Historically Black College or University (HBCU): Institutions of higher education founded to educate Black students in America at a time when access to higher education would have been denied to them at HWIs.

Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF/EOP): University programs in the state of New Jersey that provide financial and academic assistance to students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Socioeconomic status (SES): A term designated to describe social status, which is a combination of education, wealth/income, and occupation.

Lower socioeconomic status (LSES): Individuals whose socioeconomic status is considered low due to low educational attainment and low household income.

Black Male Leadership Programs (BMLP): Collegiate programs that serve the purpose of assisting Black males in achieving academic success while gaining important leadership skills.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): The theory that suggests that the law and institutions are inherently racist.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter aims to highlight relevant literature that studies the experiences of Black males at PWIs with the intention of showing how the leading theoretical framework regarding their experiences overlooks or undermines institutional barriers they face and should now include a theoretical framework more relevant to the issues they are facing. Furthermore, the literature reviewed supported the relevancy of this study as it provided best practices that align with the intrinsic resources students have to overcome the perceived institutional barriers they face.

The literature reviewed offers alternatives to other studies that deal with student retention and departure, which typically adhere to and build on the framework established by Tinto. These studies tend to highlight and advocate the assimilation of Black males into the dominant culture of the institution they're attending (Baber 2012). The literature reviewed not only addresses Tinto's theoretical framework but builds upon the theoretical framework of CRT, as CRT in itself addresses the gaps in Tinto's theories on student retention and departure. The literature supports the need to expand the framework established by Tinto to explicitly address the needs of Black males at PWIs, which requires the CRT lens to assist institutions and higher professionals.

Five bodies of literature have emerged that deal with the success or underachievement of Black male students, particularly at PWIs, and are reviewed in the following section. The five overarching themes presented in the literature reviewed are as follows:

- Persistence
- Self-efficacy
- Student organization involvement

- Support
- Institutional Classification & Barriers

Persistence

Persistence literature in higher education is centered on the notion that academic success on the collegiate level is attributed to the ability to adjust and acclimate to the institution in spite of barriers faced. Persistence becomes even more of a need with regard to Black males at PWIs. Grit, another way of saying mental toughness or resolve, has a positive effect on the academic success of Black males at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2014). PWIs are a prime context for Black males to experience racial microaggressions and environmental stress which leads to racial battle fatigue among Black males at PWIs (Smith et al., 2011). Beyond the realm of micro-aggressions, racial battle fatigue among Black males at PWIs is also a result of anti-Black stereotyping and hyper-surveillance (Smith et al., 2007). Racial battleground fatigue is the psychological, physiological, and emotional distress that arises from racially aggressive conditions or environments (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Black males from inner city communities are exposed to higher levels of violence and disorder, which can cause greater segregation at these institutions or represent even greater hurdles towards acclimation (Ehrmann, 2007).

Persistence is not just limited to the racial climate of a PWI or the racial battle fatigue Black male students sometimes face at these institutions. Financial burdens are also areas where Black males in college must exercise persistence. Financial matters impact college completion among Black and Hispanic males, as well as college selection, as many choose community college instead of a 4-year institution (Luke & Frank, 2015). Social class in addition to segregation are two important aspects of the Black male experience at PWIs (Torres & Massey, 2012).

Furthermore, research suggests that the way in which persistence is viewed in regard to Black males in higher education needs to be changed in itself. Researchers and practitioners need to abandon deficit informed framework, which portrays Black male students as incapable, disadvantaged, at-risk, and unintelligent, which does nothing more than feed into negative stereotypes associated with them (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Furthermore, the Black male experience is not a singular experience, as the bicultural experiences of Black immigrant students, who are routinely thrown into the category of being African American, need to be accounted for as well (Kim, 2014). Persistence is a valuable intrinsic force that allows Black males to overcome the challenges and obstacles they face while attending PWIs. Instead of relying solely on the deficits of these Black males, exploring their persistence to these deficits provides a better illustration of how they've managed to succeed at these institutions. Colleges and universities would better serve Black males, particularly those from LSES, by assisting them in exploring how being persistent has been beneficial to them and why it is important that they remain persistent during their collegiate experience. Programming geared specifically to this population of students should be developed by institutions and current programs in place at these institutions should be strengthened and continuously supported.

Self-Efficacy

According to self-efficacy literature, which hinges on Tinto's integration framework, Black males who have the ability to believe in themselves succeed, even at PWIs. African American males with high college GPAs academically and socially integrate into their campuses. Their ability to maintain a sense of racial identity and self-efficacy allows that integration to take place (Reid, 2013).

Racial identity and its development are key to the academic integration and success of African American males in their first year of college at PWIs (Lorenzo, 2012). A sense of self and of what it means to be African American in an environment unfamiliar to African American male students will assist that student in the successful matriculation from first-year student to sophomore year. In addition, racial identity also correlates with how Black male students at PWIs actually define success, as it is not limited to just their academics and matriculation but their ability to persist in spite of the obstacles faced at these institutions (Bates, 2017). We also see that self-efficacy has an influence on student outcomes, including resilience (Green, 2016). The relationship between self-efficacy and resilience is significant considering the nature of this study. How students view themselves ultimately determines how they see themselves being able to bounce back from obstacles and barriers, particularly Black males at PWIs.

Strayhorn (2015) argued in his study on Black males in college STEM programs that self-efficacy is a major factor in influencing their collegiate success. Even more telling is the role of self-efficacy prior to their enrollment in college as pre-college efficacy serves as an indicator for college preparation, particularly for Black males in the STEM fields (Strayhorn, 2015). As a result of their positive attitudes toward their racial identity, Black males at five research universities reported higher levels of faculty and social acclimation and integration, which led to higher GPAs (Reid, 2013). Black males at PWI who have the opportunity to develop their racial identity and who have high self-efficacy are able to achieve collegiate success. Therefore, it is important that colleges and universities understand the importance of self-efficacy in the integration process and provide opportunities for Black males to build on this intrinsic trait. This can happen inside the classroom by offering courses relevant to their experiences (i.e., *The Psychology of the Black Experience*) and through non-academic programming developed

through campus life and student organizations. These recommendations are in alignment with Tinto's later revisions that placed more emphasis on institutions to assist with student acclimation.

Student Involvement

Student involvement is another area highlighted by Tinto as a factor in student retention. Campus-based organizations and programs have an impact on the overall retention of African American males at PWIs. African American males who were actively involved in the student organization known as Project Empowerment for Black males at a particular PWI were able to acclimate to that institution and did well academically despite the barriers they faced, which included academic under-preparedness (Simmons, 2013). Participants in this organization met frequently throughout the academic year to discuss and address issues around their academic preparedness, goal setting, social adjustment, and acclimation, in an environment where they were encouraged, supported, and edified.

Furthermore, student involvement in campus clubs and organizations is a process that yields good results with regard to retention and academic success, as Black male student leaders at predominantly white institutions fare better in both areas than their non-student leader counterparts (Moschella, 2013). The process known as the Black Male Leadership Emergence on Predominantly White Campuses (BMLEPWC) is a model that came as a result of the study done at two PWIs, which highlighted the importance of these Black males to being involved on campus and them holding leadership positions in predominantly white organizations on those campuses (Moschella, 2013).

There is a strong need for Black males to be involved in campus student-led organizations or organizations that are institutionally created specifically for Black males, as

they produce persistence and other leadership qualities in students that help them transition into and matriculate at PWIs (Simmons, 2013). Black male students are not only resilient, but they successfully identify and use protective strategies like peer and faculty mentoring and guidance, which aids in their academic success (Harper, 2012, 2013). Civic engagement is another way for Black males to get involved on campus. Black males who are more politically efficacious responded that they are more civically engaged on their campuses, even in the presence of a negative campus racial climate (Leath & Chavous, 2017). CRTs help us understand how Black males need to be more civically engaged at PWIs as inherently racist institutions, including higher education, require restructuring and change that are both social and political.

Institutionally created Black Male Leadership Programs (BMLP) at PWIs, similar to same-race student organizations, have an impact on the academic success of Black males at PWIs, as they link Black male students to academic and social campus communities and partnerships while increasing cultural connection to the university (Barker & Avery, 2012). Diversity programming and organizations also have an impact on campus satisfaction and acclimation for Black male students at PWIs (Neighbors, 2016). These studies show the need for PWIs to develop programming geared specifically toward Black males and to encourage their participation in these programs, as they increase the likelihood of Black males staying at the institution despite the barriers they face. While student involvement supports Tinto's theories, here we see that it is not just Black males being involved in mainstream campus organizations, but the importance of them being involved in organizations created specifically to address their unique experiences as Black males at PWIs. My involvement with these types of leadership programs as a student and professional highlights the efficacy of these programs regarding the success and resiliency of Black male students at PWIs.

Support

Support plays a vital role in the matriculation of Black males at PWIs, as the environment on its own may not be supportive of the needs of these students. Therefore, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on this type of support with literature to validate its importance. However, even if support is at the center of Tinto's framework, when it comes to supporting Black males at PWIs, the person offering the support becomes just as critical as the support itself. Black males at Historically White Institutions (HWIs) view peer relationships with other Black males and mentoring and engagement from Black faculty as critical to their persistent efforts at their universities (Brooms & Davis, 2017). These support relationships have a direct impact and strong correlation with the academic success of these Black males at HWIs. Male bonding is important for Black males at PWIs as they attempt to acclimate to that environment (Jackson & Hui, 2017). Supportive peer relationships where Black males at HWI can develop a sense of community and brotherhood with other Black males also contribute to their sense of belonging and allow them to adjust to the institution (Brooms, 2016).

While Tinto's (1975) theory suggested, among other things, that students can create the potential for college success by integrating into their college community while separating themselves from previous communities, Black male students are still in need of the support of their families, a community that Tinto's theory suggests they leave behind (Davis & Palmer, 2011). Even Black male students entering college through a summer bridge program that offered remediation, which in turn addressed their under-preparedness, still benefited greatly from strong familial support to help them adjust and persist through their collegiate experience (Davis & Palmer, 2011). Many Black males who thrive in higher education sought out family for a variety of reasons, including resources, encouragement, and even spirituality to give them a sense of

inner strength (Kim & Hardgrove, 2013). Whether support is found through families, peers, student organizations, or institutional staff or faculty, it is something Black males at PWIs are seeking because it plays a vital role in their ability to acclimate and succeed at these institutions. PWIs must recognize the importance of supportive relationships and do their part to foster these relationships for Black male students. Creating mentoring programs on a peer-to-peer level is needed, in addition, the hiring of more Black male faculty and staff would offer mentorship and a familial environment to Black male students who need that level of support. Furthermore, it would serve institutions well to incorporate the family, not exclude them, in the support process as well, particularly for Black males who are first generation or who come from LSES.

Institutional Classification and Barriers

Both the landscape and structure of higher education in the United States are diverse and complex. This complexity should not be ignored when discussing the success of Black males in higher education institutions. Black males who attend public 2-year institutions are vastly different from those who attend public 4-year institutions, despite sharing the same racial and gender identities (Wood, 2013). Significant findings in the research are that Black males at 2-year institutions have lower degree expectations than those who attend 4-year institutions (Wood, 2013). In a country where obtaining post-secondary degrees can improve social class, this can have damaging effects on Black males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who are not able to obtain a 4-year degree. Even at a 2-year institution, the role socioeconomic status plays in the success of Black males is evident. Black male students at a 2-year college who identified as high socioeconomic status (SES) completed more credits and had more academic preparedness than those who identified as having low SES (Horton Jr., 2015). One can interpret that those Black males of high SES would move on to a 4-year institution at rates higher than

their counterparts from low SES, based on higher credit completion and more academic preparedness, thus allowing them to obtain a baccalaureate degree, which helps to improve their SES.

Furthermore, through the lens of CRT, we know that institutions of higher education, regardless of classification, are inherently racist. HWIs are deemed as such because they historically were not intended for people of color. When Black males step on these campuses to begin their collegiate experience, they are also stepping onto a campus that has benefited from racism and that still has structural issues due to racism. Even in today's equity and equity-mindedness environment, we must accept that it has been "whiteness," not the achievement gap, which is responsible for sustaining racial inequality in higher education (Bensimon, 2018). While many of the systemic issues of racism can be easily overlooked due to the interweaving of them within the fabric of the institution, some forms of institutional racism are overt. Students across the country are being exposed to overtly racist white supremacist groups on university campuses that support white nationalist ideals that threaten Black students (Montano, 2019). These are the barriers that could ultimately impede the success of Black males at these institutions, barriers that require students to be resilient, and barriers that the institution must assist Black students to be resilient to and ultimately remove.

Conclusion

Literature in the areas of persistence, self-efficacy, student involvement, support, and structure of the institution highlight how these areas contribute to the success, or lack thereof, of Black males in higher education in various landscapes of institutions of higher learning. The literature reviewed both expands upon and fills in the gaps that are associated with Tinto's theoretical framework while also highlighting and illustrating the need to look at the success and

hindrances of Black males at PWIs through the lens of CRT. We know that Black males at PWIs who experienced anti-Black racism to which they had to be resilient, fostered higher levels of critical thinking and an advanced path to self-actualization (Hotchkins & Dancy II, 2015). However, the literature does not build much on resiliency in itself, which is not necessarily the same as persistence. Studies have shown that resiliency can be something that is fostered, protected, and enhanced within adolescents (Turner, 2000). Therefore, it is worth exploring how this phenomenon is protected and enhanced in college students, particularly as it relates to a demographic of students in an environment where the enhancement of said phenomenon is needed most; Black males from LSES at PWIs. This study addressed the gap in the literature using a framework that connects resiliency to socioeconomic status for Black males at PWIs, more specifically those who have entered college through access programs designed for students from low SES. This study also added to the theoretical framework established by Tinto by addressing Black males from LSES at PWIs while also highlighting the importance of looking at the experiences of these individuals through the lens of CRT.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study is designed to examine the role resilience plays in Black males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds successfully overcoming perceived institutional barriers during their attendance at a predominantly White institution (PWI). A qualitative study is appropriate to conduct this research as it allows the participants to provide a narrative regarding their own experiences at PWIs, the barriers they faced, the resilience they needed to overcome these barriers to persist, and what role the institution or opportunity program played in helping them overcome these barriers. Using qualitative methodology to examine the phenomenon of resilience regarding Black male college students at PWIs allows for a better understanding of the experiences of Black males at these institutions while providing greater clarity on what barriers are present at these institutions (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

Rationale

A phenomenological approach was selected for this study to conduct an investigation on the role resilience plays in Black male students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in overcoming barriers at predominantly white institutions to maintain academic success. I utilized this study to give meaning to the phenomenon of the resilience of low-income black males during their collegiate careers at PWIs, so the design of this study is centered on this framework. The current study is based on one-on-one interviews with Black male students who entered PWIs in New Jersey via the Educational Opportunity Fund Program. These data were used to substantiate the participants' narratives of their academic and personal successes and to highlight if there is any connection between their matriculation/graduation and resilience. A

purposive/selective sampling method is utilized in securing students for the study, as my familiarity with the EOF program helps to establish a rapport to invite the participants who participate in the study, based on their fitting the profile.

Role of the Researcher

It is important to note that I am a Black male who attended a predominantly white institution (PWI) and who had entered the institution through an opportunity program for low-income students. The motivation to do this research was due to my experiences as a Black male at a PWI and the role that resiliency played in the researcher's academic success. Furthermore, the researcher's role as a practitioner in the field of higher education has allowed him to work with the same population, incorporating resilience in methods and best practices to ensure the academic success of Black male students, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This study was not only a way to show the importance of resilience in the academic success of these students but to provide them with a narrative, through this study, that is often overlooked in other studies which attributes their academic success to a variety of factors that do not necessarily highlight the resilience of these students. This study also highlights opportunity programs for students from low-income families attending college.

Due to the structure of these male leadership programs, mentorship and guidance from both campus and off-campus partners are something that is encouraged and, in some cases, required of the participants. This gives me the opportunity to establish a rapport with the students, especially given my role at my university coordinating a male leadership program and the fact that, for an EOF professional, the likelihood of seeing the students after the study is higher. EOF programs on a statewide level meet at student and professional conferences and collaborate frequently, especially as it relates to male leadership initiatives, such as the EOF

Male Leadership Academy. Furthermore, my identities as a Black male, a first-generation college student, a student who attended a PWI, and an EOF student allows him to establish a rapport with the participants creating a safe space for the research, one where the participants were more comfortable sharing their experiences, challenges and express their needs from the program and the universities they are attending. My task was to listen to and document the experiences of these Black male students and the role resilience played in shaping those experiences, with particular attention being given to how it contributed to their acclimation to the university and their overall persistence.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceived barriers at PWIs that require resilience from low-income Black males?

RQ2: What role does resilience play in how low-income Black males at PWIs see themselves overcoming the barriers they face at these institutions?

RQ3: How Is resilience among low-income Black males something fostered through Educational Opportunity Fund programs there that serve low-income students?

Participants

The participants for this study were Black males who have graduated from two PWIs in the state of New Jersey, one a large public institution and the other a small private institution. A total of eight participants were recruited for the survey: four alumni of the small private institution and four alumni of the large public institution. The eight participants would have been admitted to the universities via an opportunity program for low-income New Jersey residents known as the Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF). The large university has an enrollment of just over 20,000 students and the small university has an enrollment of just under

5,000 students. However, at both institutions, students who identify as Black males comprise less than 5% of that population, as the Educational Opportunity Fund, though not a race-based program, finds itself admitting close to 50% of those incoming Black males who are from lower socioeconomic statuses. Furthermore, these males would have been participants in male leadership programs within their EOF programs or the institution. These programs were created to help close the achievement gap between male and female students, while also being retention efforts for this particular group of students, who are of great interest to the university.

An application known as GroupMe allowed me to reach out to graduates of the EOF Male Leadership Program to invite them, as these participants are part of an active group within the application that allows them to maintain communication with staff and peers after graduation. I also had access to the alumni database for the EOF program at the small private institution and invited students via email. Participants who are recruited for the study were initially informed of the study by me and verbally agreed to participate in the study. The participants then received correspondence from me officially inviting them to participate in the study. Participants had to complete an informed consent form (Appendix B). Once recruited, participants met with me virtually to go over in detail the nature and purpose of the study and filled out the consent form giving their consent to participate. Participants were also given a survey (Appendix C) to fill out that asked for general information needed for each participant. This information includes name, contact info, age, race and ethnicity, hometown, and the college the participants attended. I protected the privacy interests of the participants and am the only person with access to what they shared. No data that identifies the participants by name will be published or disclosed to third parties, though other identifiers, such as major, hometown, and socioeconomic status, will be published. I assigned pseudonyms to the participants to protect their anonymity.

Data Collection

Data were collected from students via the interviews conducted to gain an understanding of their journey to college through the mandatory pre-freshman summer bridge program and their matriculation. These one-on-one interviews, ranging from 45 to 60 minutes long, were conducted on three separate occasions throughout the duration of the study to determine how resilient the students perceived themselves to be at the start of their collegiate and how resilient they felt at the end of their college experience. Examples of the open-ended questions include (a) “What are some of the issues you believed you’d face as a college student prior to you attending?,” (b) “How have you overcome barriers that stood in the way of you doing well academically?,” (c) “How would you describe your institution’s ability to assist students from various economic backgrounds?,” (d) “What has been your most difficult experience as a Black male attending a PWI?,” (e) “In what ways do you consider yourself to be a resilient individual?,” and (f) “How well did your EOF summer bridge program prepare you for your first semester of college?” Interviews were recorded, with those recordings played back for participants to ensure accuracy. Participants also reviewed recordings and transcripts.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis through the use of coding was the technique I used to analyze the data collected from the interviews, which were taped and transcribed. All transcription and coding will be done manually. Coding allowed me to identify information that was relevant to answering the research questions of the study (Simmons, 2013). I analyzed the recordings and transcripts of the interviews with study participants, leaving comments most relevant to the research questions in the margins. Coding allowed me to identify and annotate various themes and patterns that emerged from the collected data. Notes taken during the interviews allowed me

to develop broad codes. Examples of a code based on questions asked would be the term “barriers.” Line-by-line coding of each transcript afforded me the opportunity to establish more codes with greater specificity. Therefore, a broad code such as “barriers” may give way to more specific categories such as “institutional barriers,” “economic barriers,” and “personal barriers.”

Other anticipated codes to be broken down into specific categories included “trauma.” That code can give way to more specific categories such as “family trauma” or “resolved trauma.” The categorization of said codes was then analyzed to see what themes emerge from the data. The themes selected were relevant to the research questions and the purpose of the study. The themes themselves were categorized as overarching and congruent across the transcripts analyzed and smaller themes that aid and support the overarching themes, thus allowing a complete narrative to be told from the data collected. As noted, all data were carefully and thoroughly analyzed via the transcripts from interviews, and participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the accuracy of the data to ensure its trustworthiness.

Anticipated Significance

It was anticipated that participants would find the EOF program beneficial in fostering resiliency and easily identify barriers at the institution that have the potential to impede their academic success. It was also anticipated that these participants would attribute much of their success in matriculation at and graduation from their respected universities to the EOF programs they were students of, particularly those programs being able to use resiliency as a method to assist them. Last, was also anticipated that students who see themselves as resilient would be more confident in their ability to overcome these identified institutional barriers and be able to articulate in detail how they were able to do so. This study could serve as evidence for continued

financial support, especially from universities, for EOF programs that allowed for more students to be recruited into the program and for universities to remove identified barriers.

Summary

First-generation low-income Black male students who participated in opportunity programs at a PWI were interviewed and surveyed about their experiences as Black males at these institutions and the barriers they faced. This study analyzed the role resilience played in these Black males being able to persist and achieve success despite the perceived barriers they faced at a PWI. The study also looked at how they perceived their institution and the EOF program that they belonged to in helping them recognize their resilience and utilize it to assist them. Interviews were recorded and replayed for the Black male student participants to ensure accuracy and pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity. The significance of this study not only contributes to the phenomenon of resilience but also the worthiness of opportunity programs like EOF that work closely with first-generation Black males from lower socioeconomic statuses and why institutions need to offer more financial support for EOF programs. Financial support will allow EOF programs to bring in more students who can benefit from the programs, provide more resources for the students currently in the programs, and hire more staff within the EOF program, as many are understaffed and forced to do more with less. Last, this study lends support to the creation of Male Leadership programs to ensure greater success for Black males within EOF.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The data are presented in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of resilience in the experiences of eight Black males who attended predominantly white institutions in New Jersey via an opportunity program known as The Educational Opportunity Fund Program. Therefore, this chapter gives a profile of the participants, presents the findings, and answers the research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceived barriers at PWIs that require resilience from low-income Black males?

Participant Profiles

This study examined resilience in the experiences of Black males in EOF programs at PWIs. Therefore, there were particular traits or backgrounds that all participants shared. Since EOF is an opportunity program only available to New Jersey residents, all of the participants were living in New Jersey at the time of their collegiate experiences. All were from towns with high poverty rates and lived in inner-city communities, with the exception of one. Their hometown demographics are of great importance because they reflect their socioeconomic status, which made them eligible for the EOF program and they presented the participants with a host of factors to be resilient to prior to their arrival at college. Common characteristics of these communities include poverty, high crime rates, single parent households, gang activity, high dropout rates within high schools, and a lack of educational resources.

All but two of the participants were first generation college students. Despite both being low-income and first-gen, all of the participants graduated from their respective universities, with

three of them earning master's degrees. Due to the fact that participants were all college graduates, their ages ranged from 24 to 39. These ages represent a diverse range of experiences of Black men who attended these universities for undergraduate coursework between 1999 and 2019. It is also worth noting that all of these participants, with the exception of one, have either worked in the field of education or currently do, despite the various undergraduate degrees. Three of the participants currently work or have worked as EOF professionals. In addition to all of the participants being EOF students, four of them were also participants in the EOF Male Leadership Academy, a program within EOF at their institutions that aims to close the achievement gap between male and female students.

The institutions that were represented in this study were Sojourner University, a very large predominantly White public institution in northern New Jersey. With a total student population of over 20,000 there are more total students who identify as Black and male, though in terms of actual percentages, the institution is in alignment with most predominantly White institutions, like Douglas University. Douglas is a small liberal arts institution located in central New Jersey. Douglas has a much smaller student population, with approximately 5,000 students. Despite its small overall size and racial diversity, including Black males, it is on par with other predominantly White institutions in the state. Furthermore, the EOF programs at both institutions recruit from the same areas throughout the state, which means the profiles of its students, particularly the Black males, are the same. Table 1 provides a profile of the participants, including their pseudonyms, college pseudonyms, ages, hometowns, the highest level of education completed, occupations, and majors in college.

Table 1***Participant Profiles***

Name	Hometown	Age	College	Major	First-Gen	Occupation	Highest Level of Education
Andrew Hughes	East Orange, NJ	28	Sojourner University	Sociology	No	School Organizer	B.A.
Rasheed McKay	Sicklerville, NJ	24	Sojourner University	Comm Studies	No	Guidance Counselor	M.A
James Dubois	Newark, NJ	26	Sojourner University	Business	Yes	Higher Ed Professional	B.S.
Ernest King	Penns Grove, NJ	34	Douglass University	Psychology	Yes	Global Program Manager	M.A
Doc Owens	Camden, NJ	26	Sojourner University	Physical Education	Yes	EOF Recruiter	M.A
Howard Louis	Newark, NJ	25	Sojourner University	Business	Yes	HR Consultant	B.S.
Anthony Marshall	Irvington, NJ	39	Douglass University	Education	Yes	Community Organizer	B.S.
Dione Shabazz	Newark, NJ	31	Douglass University	Business	Yes	School Principal	B.S.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this qualitative study was collected via individual interviews with the participants. Given the design of the study, the individual participants being interviewed provided a way to give voice to their experiences and the role resilience played in those experiences, particularly with the barriers they faced at these predominantly white institutions.

Over the course of 2 weeks, I interviewed all participants via Zoom, as this method was the most convenient and the safest considering that the interviews took place in the midst of a pandemic in which individuals were quarantining and sheltering in place. Interviews ranged from thirty to sixty minutes in length. Once the interviews were complete, participants were emailed a recording of the interview to check for accuracy. Once respondent validation was achieved and with permission from the participants to move forward, I then transcribed and edited the interviews, which provided greater accuracy to the participants' narratives. I then began the process of coding each individual interview to highlight themes and find information significant in answering the research questions that drove this study. The coding process consisted of me examining the transcripts of each individual participant making comments and notations next to data that were most apt for the research questions the study sought to answer through these interviews with participants. The data collected and coding conducted allowed me to present findings related directly to the research questions.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer questions related to the resilience of Black males in EOF programs at predominantly White institutions. These questions aimed to highlight barriers that these Black males faced at their institution of higher learning, whether they viewed themselves as being resilient enough to overcome them, and what role, if any, their EOF program played in helping them become resilient to these barriers.

RQ1: What are the perceived barriers at PWIs that require resilience from low-income Black males?

The interviews revealed that there were two main barriers for low-income Black males at PWIs that required them to be resilient. First, because these men came to college as EOP

students, we know that they had to meet income criteria to be eligible for the program; income requirements that are set up for low-income students/families. It was not surprising to find that most participants saw their finances, or lack thereof, as a significant barrier for them. Financial instability, something that was present for these men prior to college, did not go away simply because they were EOF students and in a program that provides financial assistance. While an EOF grant and additional financial assistance to put towards tuition and fees definitely goes a long way in helping to meet the needs of these Black men, it did not address the needs they had beyond tuition and fees; very real and tangible needs that could have interfered with their academic success and chances of matriculation while in school.

As Doughtry Owens pointed out, his freshman year came with the harsh reality that his financial situation had not changed because he had gone to college so working to provide for himself was still a necessity, and food insecurity was still very much a part of his life.

I felt like everybody just had more than me, or at least on the surface level, they had more than me. And again, I was catching the bus back home to get what I could from Footlocker. But trying to go out and keep up with everything, especially as a freshman, was definitely hard. Um, you know, you run out of those meal swipes and things like that, and then you gotta find money to eat. So that was something I didn't think about ahead of time.

Echoing the sentiments of Owens was Ernest King, whose barriers proved to be all financial in his beginning years at the PWI he attended. Here we see once again the impact of financial barriers on the perceived and actual experiences of low-income Black males at PWIs.

It was definitely the socioeconomic pieces up front. Um obviously the program is for first-generation low-income students, you already know things like books and things like, uh, I would say basic needs like eating, like having spending money before you actually get a job. Those things are tough. Um, especially in stark comparison to some of your colleagues. Maybe you have your roommate coming from a more affluent area. You have that . . . like you're 19, 18 years old, comparing yourself to your counterparts who come from a totally different world. So, early on, it was all socioeconomics. It wasn't until my junior year that I realized, like, "Oh, being black here is a totally different experience.

While financial barriers or obstacles clearly represent an obstacle for low-income Black males, those barriers can appear magnified when you are an independent student. From a financial aid perspective, independent students are those who lack parental support and without legal guardians thus placing them in positions where they are supporting themselves financially to a very large extent. So, while there are very tangible financial barriers by way of the actual money needed for college, financial literacy and understanding of financial aid procedures are also barriers, especially for those students without parental support. One of the participants in this study, James Dubois, described the added financial pressures that come with being an independent student.

I came in as an independent student. So um, me actually having to, you know, learn what that was and learn what documents I had to submit because I didn't have a parent that was submitting documents or doing my FAFSA or helping me with that. So, it was something where I had to do my research and go to certain people in financial aid or somebody at EOP, an EOP counselor, and just asked them what do I need to do. Like how do I do this? Or how do I do that? That was one, I guess, of the challenges.

While the revelation of just how financially stressful college could seem to have occurred for many of the participants during their freshman year, some, like Rasheed McKay, were worried about finances before they stepped on campus.

Money probably was the biggest one. I did not know how I was going to afford school. We had financial stressors before. I was so excited about coming to Sojourner University because I knew I was in the EOF program, but I didn't know how much money I would get or what my bill was going to be. I thought that was going to be the toughest obstacle I had because my family always wanted me to go to school but how are you going to make that happen logistically wasn't really a conversation.

Though concerns regarding finances and the ability to pay for college were always with Rasheed, freshman year did answer those questions regarding how he would pay for college. That answer painted a clear picture for him of where they were financially while representing another financial concern: student debt.

I remember my mom sent me to the bank and she took me out, um a plus loan for me for 10 grand. And that was for my housing. And I had a couple of thousand dollars left over. She was like, this is for books and expenses and stuff like that. Um, and I remember that very vividly. Cause I remember when I left, I knew I wasn't going to have the opportunity again. She wasn't going to do that for another three years like this is all I had. Um, so it was in the back of my head like somehow, somehow I have to find out how to pay for this for years. So that was an obstacle.

As testimonials from participants highlight, financial barriers were definitely perceived and actualized before and during their experiences at these institutions. This was not surprising given that these Black male participants were part of an opportunity program designed to assist students from financially challenged backgrounds. However, financial barriers were not the only barriers faced, especially given the identities of these participants. So, while finances would certainly be a barrier for low-income students, we also see race being a barrier for these Black males at a PWI.

Due to the fact that these participants had grown up their entire lives leading up to college dealing with financial instability or struggling with poverty, their resilience to those conditions had been present for years. The issue of race was a totally different matter. For many of them, the issues that these institutions made for them on the basis of their racial makeup and identities represented something quite foreign to them, as many of them grew up in neighborhoods where everyone looked like them, so this represented the first time that they were confronted with their minority status.

Speaking about his experience at orientation, Dione Shabazz recalls vividly when he first came to the realization that he was a Black male at a predominantly White institution. Recollections like his highlight how identifying as a Black man in a white space where your race becomes an issue can limit or impact a sense of belonging, something that Tinto says must be achieved in order for students to stay at the institution.

I met a young lady, and she was just staring at me. We were sitting there, she was staring at and I'm like, very uncomfortable wondering why she was staring and someone next to her asked her, like, why are you staring at him? And she's like, I'd never never seen one before. She was like, no, I'm not trying to be rude. Like, I've actually never seen, like, a Black person in real life, like outside of TV and stuff. I've never seen a Black person. Wow. And so like, that was the experience that I was having as a 17-year-old, already struggling with identity and stuff. And I just felt like I don't belong here, man. This is not right.

Shabazz expounded even more by connecting his experience to what others may have been going through as well:

I don't know if they've changed now, but then I was there, uh 92% white, 8% minority and 2% of that minority, Black. That's what I remember now. This was a long time ago, but that's what I remember as a 17-year-old. I'm pretty good with numbers. Those numbers stood out to me. So, I have the constant everyday feeling like, I don't belong right. There was maybe even a few uh professors or administrators that look like me outside of the EOF department. Right. So, like, even being able to see the connection was not there had it not been for EOF.

We know through Tinto's work the importance of social acclimation that a sense of belonging is essential in reducing student attrition and increasing student retention. So, one can only imagine what a student's experience is like when from the moment of new student orientation these students already feel as though they do not belong. We also see that this experience is something that is not just present throughout their freshman year, but their entire time spent at these predominantly White institutions. This experience is not just shared in social settings but is highlighted even more so in the classroom.

Um, in the classroom was a lot harder, uh than looking around and noticing that you're the only Black person in the classroom is definitely a thing. Um, I was an athletic training major, so it was, like, intensified because the program only brings in so little people either way on a yearly basis definitely noticed that I was, I was probably like one of three Black people. (Doc Owens)

Uh, I mean, well, one is just the fear of being the only person in a classroom. Right. Because you know, I initially thought like, you know, if I'm the only Black person in that classroom, everything that I say can be used as like, you know, the voice of Black people, right? As if like, you know, Black people are a monolith. Right. (Andrew Hughes)

I remember having a lot (of incidents involving race) in undergrad being in the communications department. Um, there would be a lot of cultural conversations we would have just about pop culture, certain music, certain shows. Um, and the examples that were always used were always all white. If we were talking about a television series to show whatever they were teaching, it was always Friends. We were talking about, like, a music group or something like that. Like it was usually the Beatles or something. Typically, everybody in the class knew. I didn't. I don't know who the cast of friends is, so because of that, I'm not able to really, you know, to be on it. Um, so that was something that I definitely had a couple of conversations with people about in undergrad because I definitely wasn't the only person in the class that way. So that was a bit of a trend. (Rasheed McKay)

In these three testimonials, we see just how being a Black person in the classroom at a predominantly White institution has the ability to challenge this sense of belonging that Tinto highlights while also illustrating the barriers that automatically come with being black in an inherently racist environment that Critical Race Theory speaks of. In one instance we see how the realization of being one of the few Black people in a class or major automatically sends a message to a Black male that he does not belong. We then see how being one of those few or only Black males in a class also adds pressure to those men that they have to represent all Black people in a space causing them to silence themselves in an environment where participation is required. Last, we see that the lack of cultural competence amongst professors is fostered in an environment where the experiences of Black students, especially Black males, were never factored into the educational framework of these predominantly White institutions, thus making it perfectly acceptable to aid in an inherently racist system without even knowing it.

While building on this notion of an inherently racist environment, we see another barrier as it relates to race with Black males at predominantly White institutions, the judicial system. Just as there is a judicial system that seeks to establish order and compliance with the communities that these Black men come from, communities riddled with racist judicial policies and sanctions, there is that same system on a college campus. College campuses have both

judicial boards and law enforcement that seek to establish order and compliance while also handing out punishments and sanctions. Testimonials from the participants in this study also highlighted the many barriers they faced due to being Black males at PWIs. Rasheed McKay described an incident that he believes was racially motivated that led to him being viewed and treated as a criminal despite his innocence.

I remember this little situation I was in. I'm not gonna say it was tied to race, but I felt like it was for me. My freshman year, my roommate had lost his license, I believe at a party or something. I ended up getting wrapped up in the investigation. I'm not too sure how, um, and that was just a process that I had to go through with the police department on campus. I remember one of my friends on campus got tied into it too. I wasn't too sure how but that we were both African American males. I just remember us being in questioning, I guess you can call it and the White identifying female officer was telling me, "You know, we're just doing our job." We have this person, we have a picture of this person who stole the card and he kind of looks like you. And he also looks like your friend and me and my friend don't look alike at all. I was upset and ironically enough, um, the day they, the second time actually, they brought me to their station twice. The second time they brought me in was at an event called Neck Tie Tuesday. Neck Tie Tuesday was an event that my organization did every Tuesday to promote professionalism among marginalized populations. So, I got the necktie on, feeling good. You know what I'm saying? And I just remember having this outfit on trying to exemplify positivity for my community and I'm being put in a squad car in front of Freedom Hall. I was done. I was tight.

McKay even reflects on how that humiliating incident changed his viewpoint of where he was attending college and how it even correlates to what Black males experience outside of college.

I was a little bit more aware of who was around me and you know, trying not to be in places where I may look suspicious. And I remember going through the whole investigation process. I filed a complaint. Like I went to whoever the head detective was over there. And it was just like something that didn't get anywhere. Everything was inconclusive. They were doing their job . . . this and this and the investigation. I've definitely been thinking a lot lately, as we see, you know, everything with the police and unarmed Black men being shot and as investigations into those things go, it kind of felt like the same way for me and it's the same way for them. So, I don't know. It's a weird connection for me there.

McKay was not the only participant who experienced what they felt to be racism in the judicial process at their university, particularly in cases when they were falsely accused. Anthony

Marshall recalls an incident he had in the residence hall in which a Resident Assistant (RA) falsely accused him of something for which he could have been expelled:

I was a freshman, you know, a couple of weeks into the first semester that um, my roommate and I were told we were smoking, smoking weed in our room uh by one of the RAs. And you know we never took those types of drugs as a freshmen. I'm like, "Oh it was a White RA." We were two, you know, Black kids who listen to music. We were guilty of playing our music too loud, but I automatically assumed they were racist. I never confirmed that, but that's all I knew. Like you know, this is a white person, blaming and uh assuming that a Black person did this. So, they must be racists.

Like McKay, Marshall reflected on the message that the incident sent him and how it gave him a different view of the institution he attended while comparing it to the experiences of Black men outside of college.

You know we may have, um, dealt with discrimination in our urban areas, but racism, it was really hard to uncover because everyone looked the same. If we hated each other it was for, like, other reasons. This is a gang member, or this is a drug dealer. And that's why they're doing this. Not because they were racist towards you. That crept in on Douglas' campus to me pretty early, right? So fear of just not wanting to be around people that didn't look like me.

Even for students who actually did something that warranted them coming before a school judicial board, like James Dubois, there was still the perception that his White peers were disciplined in the same way.

I guess some of the things I was getting into, like if I was getting in trouble. I felt like it was more weighted on me, of me doing something than if somebody else (a White person). It would've been less consequences than if I did something like that.

White students doing something—in this case, acts that they should not have been punished for—were also one of the racist acts that served as a barrier for one participant. Ernest King describes his account of racist acts he witnessed at Douglas University, such as his girlfriend's door being vandalized with racist and derogatory comments. Acts like this can clearly send a message to students that they are in a racially hostile environment, but the lack of action from the

school to discipline the perpetrator also sends a message that White students who break the rules are not held accountable the way Black students are.

In conclusion, financial and racial barriers that present themselves to low-income Black male students who are attending PWIs are huge barriers that can impact the retention of these students and do require resilience on their part to overcome. The phenomenon of resilience and its impact on these Black males successfully matriculating through a collegiate landscape that presented itself with significant barriers is the focus of this study and leads to the second question this study attempts to answer.

Research Question 2: What role does resilience play in how low-income Black males at PWIs see themselves overcoming the barriers they faced at these institutions?

Based on the interviews with the participants of this study, we see that resilience played a significant role in helping them to overcome the challenges they faced. The ability to not be deterred by their barriers is what leads to these men being able to matriculate towards graduation and also not transfer to other institutions. Therefore, resilience is a factor that helps in the retention of Black males from LSES at predominantly white institutions. For most participants, resilience was not necessarily something that they discovered in college, as they faced so many obstacles due to their socioeconomic status that required them to be resilient. Poverty and the neighborhoods that they lived in provided them with plenty of barriers to overcome:

Homelessness, poverty, uh shelters. That was our lifestyle. Um, dad was out of the picture. Mom had six kids, so those are the things I had to bounce back from. At 8 years old, being separated from my siblings, going to live with another parent that was not a relative, almost a stranger at the time. Uh, something that I had to learn, how to be resilient about and bounce back from. (Dione Shabazz)

So, a lot of the difficulties that I had around, like trying to persevere early on was more socioeconomics. I think from there what ends up happening for me is that you begin to develop a contingency plan for everything. Any event that doesn't go right, what then happens, builds a catalyst so to speak around how you deal with tough experiences

because I've been through things that most people, I guess, have not. So, in that space, it was like because I've experienced things as a kid that most kids my age didn't, I was better suited and better prepared to deal with hardships going forward. (Ernest King)

Growing up there came with a whole lot of difficulties and challenges. I just started doing things on my own. So, I had to bounce back. (Howard Louis)

I didn't have a quote on quote the normal things in life or things were difficult in terms of struggling but that in a way sort of was helping us develop these survival skills or the mentality to understand everything is not perfect; you just keep pushing. If you asked me at five, twelve, or even sixteen what the word resilient means, I probably wouldn't have been able to tell you. But through life and through being able to talk to people who had similar experiences, I started to understand that that is exactly what it was. That understanding is kind of what, you know, instead of being ashamed of the struggles, I sort of used that as rocket fuel. (Anthony Marshall)

Furthermore, we see through several participant testimonies that resilience was not something that was optional but necessary, as their upbringings left them with no choice but to be resilient. Adding to that was the feeling that being resilient was something that came so naturally to them due to them always having to be resilient. Adverse childhood experiences can greatly impact the resilience of children living through them, building and shaping their resilience without their knowledge that this phenomenon was developing within them. As Rasheed McKay stated, "At birth, when I was, I guess practicing resiliency. It was something that was kind of second nature, not something I really thought of." In the words of James Dubois,

I wasn't like I'm about to be resilient and do this or do that. I was like, "I have to do something to actually, you know, move forward, move on, try to progress. So, it wasn't something where it was like I'm being resilient, but it was something where I didn't like the circumstances I was in. So, I had to try to find some action to, you know, prevail, you know, succeed in something. (James Dubois)

But even in college, I never thought of it as being resilient. I was, like, I'm on a mission. I know what I gotta do. And I've just got to do what I gotta do. Like I can't let nothing stop me. I didn't know the word resilience. (Doc Owens)

Ernest King said, "What I didn't know what was being developed was a superpower to transcend tough experiences."

Adding to these particular testimonies was that of James Dubois who, like all of the participants, had a myriad of obstacles to overcome in his childhood. Yet college was the place where he realized that he was in fact resilient:

I would have to say once I got into college because that's when I was really on my own. So, it was at that point where it was like, I made it through a lot of stuff, but then I had to reflect like I made it through a lot of stuff that I never knew it made it through in the sense of me being resilient. So, I would say when I got to college because that was the pivotal moment right there where it was like it's just me. Like nobody has me except for me right now.

Doc Owens mentioned how his knowledge of this intrinsic weapon did not become known until college when someone from his EOF department mentioned to him that he was resilient. It was then that he now had a name for this phenomenon that helped him get through his challenging upbringing and that would also help him get through college. So, while we know that these participants were resilient to get through college, we also needed to explore how resilience is fostered within EOF programs.

Research Question 3: How is resilience among low-income Black males something fostered through Educational Opportunity Fund programs there that serve low-income students?

Resilience among low-income Black males is something that is fostered through EOF programs as predominantly White institutions in several ways; recognition of the resilience itself, services provided that counter trauma caused by the situations these Black males had to be resilient to, and providing the community with other resilient individuals where these Black males did not feel isolated in their experience.

Recognition of resilience is just as important as possessing resilience. Recognizing it can change how students perceive themselves, which is particularly important for low-income Black males at predominantly White institutions, where the environment reminded them of their minority status and left them feeling as though they did not belong. To now see yourself as

someone resilient gives you the fuel needed to fight against these barriers. What we see is that the EOF programs helped these students see themselves as resilient, even though they had always been, as Rasheed McKay pointed out: “I guess they [EOF] helped me understand what it [resilience] was first and foremost. And then I just put it to good use. It helped me grow up because if you know you’re resilient, you believe that, you know, you can accomplish whatever you want.”

Like most of the participants, Doc Owens had always been resilient due to his childhood and all the adverse situations he faced. Yet, he did not see himself as resilient and it was the loss of his mother during his sophomore year, which his EOF staff found out about that allowed them to reveal to him that he was in fact a resilient person:

The first point of [recognizing] resiliency had to be losing my mom because that’s something they [EOF staff] all knew about. They all knew I had lost my mom. It was on Christmas. They knew it was over the winter break. That was the first point. Um, and then from there on getting closer to them and just talking to them about some of the other things I had been through, I think it [resilience] was just something they had to highlight. And again, even through talking with them after losing my mom and talking with them about my childhood it never crossed my mind like hey, I’m resilient personally. If someone would’ve asked me that, like, to describe myself, resilient would have never been the word that I would use. So just sharing my story and them knowing that, I guess this caused them to point it out.

When asked how that revelation impacted him, Owens further explained the power that awareness and recognition of his own resilience had on him:

At first, I didn’t really think much of it, and it was just kinda, you know, I’m doing what I got to do. But now and once it clicked, um I just used it. I know everything is a moment. Um, I know this is a moment. I know that I’m resilient now. Now I put a word to it and I know the definition behind this word and the powerfulness behind this word. So now whenever a tough moment happens, it’s like, alright this is just a moment. I can get through it. I have to figure out how to get through it. It may be hard to get through while I’m figuring it out. But once I figure it out, I’ll be good, and I’ll have learned something new.

The recognition and acknowledgment of one’s personal resilience seem to have been a powerful tool in assisting these Black males at predominantly White institutions in overcoming the

barriers they faced at these institutions. Their resilience had become something positive for them to claim despite circumstances prior to college and during college that were anything but positive. It can be seen as the “S” on their chest they proudly claimed and that showed themselves and others their superpowers. However, as powerful as resilience is and creating Superman-like grit and fight, that same resilience can in some cases also serve as their kryptonite. Here we find that EOF programs also worked well in helping students combat the trauma and issues associated with the things they had to be resilient to and the resilience itself.

Participants mentioned how their upbringing—having to always figure things out and be independent at ages when other kids did not have to—taught them to be extremely self-sufficient, to a fault at times. Dionne Shabazz explained that his ability to bounce back and figure things out did not come without a struggle.

I felt like I would never be able to rely on anyone for support, for help, for guidance. Like I would have to figure it out on my own, all of it, no matter what it was all the time. I think that was a big one. That’s something that I think, even going through adulthood and you know I’m going into my thirties now, and that’s something I had to unlearn like how to trust. You can depend on people, things like that.

Echoing the remarks of Mr. Shabazz as it relates to how being so resilient comes with this false sense of independence, are the remarks of James Dubois, who was deemed an “independent student” because he was not supported by his parents and was responsible for taking care of himself financially: “Like me, just doing it on my own is really what, you know, made it difficult in the beginning. Because it’s okay. I’ve been on my own all this time, so I’m gonna do what I want to do and that’s gonna be it.”

Dubois mentioned that the constant communication with his EOF counselor helped him to see that his resilience did not have to mean him doing it all on his own and that the program provided services to help him and was there to help him. This is an important revelation for low-

income Black males who have had to be independent to survive and have not understood the importance of interdependence.

But it was just like a family, like those tough talks that you got to get from certain family members to actually understand, even if you had to go through something. Cause I went through a lot. As I went through different types of situations where it's like, I can't do this on my own. And then there was somebody in EOF, you know, to help or talk to and it made me understand more. So, I would say you know certain independent students are definitely going to shy away from it in the beginning because they're not used to it, like I was. But in the long run, especially if they have the type of [EOF] counselors that I had, they would definitely see that they're not here to harm me. Like they're actually here to help and that's what I sought out.

Dionne Shabazz also mentioned how it was the EOF staff that helped him in the same way:

It's like clearly you're resilient, but you also don't describe yourself that way. And it's like, "Why not? It's like, I need to connect me to having to have someone to talk to, to connect the dots, to then also give them the frame of mind and the practice for you. That's just like. But from the objective standpoint, that's resilience. And so, I think it's very important too. I think about, you know, talking to my counselors through EOF. I had that. Every week I had a meeting [with my EOF counselor].

Andrew Hughes, who had considered himself to be resilient due to his upbringing, reflected on how his EOF program assisted him in dealing with the struggles he faced in college, struggles he tried to face on his own:

Through those four years when I was at Sojourner University, you know, I'd be lying if I said that there weren't dark times. I did go through a lot of struggles, but at the same time, I found a way out. And a lot of those reasons were because I had you guys to actually talk to, or just like, pull me out of whatever slump I was in. Um and you know, I've been able to internalize that to the point where I feel comfortable being able to do those things on my own now, but I wouldn't be able to do that if I didn't have the initial support from you guys.

Hughes further explained that the tools he was given by EOF to help him bounce back into college are still things he uses today.

I remind myself like, alright you fell down here because you did X, but you know when you had that conversation with Mr. Walker or Dr. Jean, these are the things that they told you, so you should try to do that. You know it's things like I said, I still do to this day. So, I definitely have to give credit to you guys for that.

As a poet who used his poetry as a means of coping and dealing with his trauma and difficult situations, Mr. Hughes reflects on how the EOF program even provided him with support to take the method he had learned to employ to another level.

I think back to the actual summer program, you know, I had just started writing poetry, like the year prior. I didn't really perform like that before the actual program. I may have performed, like, once or twice. But that summer I performed a very like, you know, a personal poem that was actually the first poem I ever wrote, which was inspired by a lot of real-life events that I experienced growing up, you in my hometown. Seeing the response I got not only from my peers, but the staff members really built this confidence muscle that I felt I was lacking for a while. Then, fast forward to the end of the [summer] program where Dr. Jean was gracious enough to provide me with studio time. You know that was just an amazing moment. It really inspired me to just tap more into being creative and just being thoughtful of how powerful my words are. I feel like those thoughtful steps that you guys took to, um, nurture my talents is something that you know has pushed me. So even a role that I'm in now, you know, I don't perform poetry, but you know, I speak on behalf of my school. I'm hosting events where I have to speak with elected officials or our parent base. So, you know, a lot of things that I do now is just a direct correlation to that confidence you guys were able to instill in me at 18 years old.

EOF provided support for students to bounce back from academic setbacks, which several of the participants faced during their collegiate experiences. Howard Louis recalls how EOF staff helped him develop resilience regarding his academics.

They [EOF] actually formed my bounce back mentality. I kinda messed up on an exam, you know. They always gave me that support, like "You know this is only a midterm. You always got time to bounce back from that." So, it was the support from EOF to definitely have a form of resiliency.

Anthony Marshall also reflected on how meetings with his EOF counselors helped him bounce back from academic stumbles and how EOF impacted his resilience through faith.

So, they taught me how to have faith beyond today. Right. So, it's like you can get a bad grade on a test, but they were always like, look this is what a whole semester's about. You know you have three more tests and two papers that can help you overcome this struggle. So, you learn to learn that again. Like, you know, life is not based off of a week; you know, you have days to get better. So, resilience got a deeper definition, and it was put on display through storytelling or group settings, which was good.

Not only do we see EOF programs equipping students with the necessary skills to remain resilient, via conversations, meetings, and programming, but we also see them going the extra

mile in setting up opportunities unique to a student's own individual way of being resilient, such as paying for studio time so that students can record their poetry and make a record. These same tools and opportunities have transcended these Black males being able to succeed in college but have helped them post-graduation as well.

In addition to awareness of resilience and tools to help them effectively utilize their resilience, EOF programs provide these Black males with a community, which helped them to see that their resilience is solely an individual experience but a shared one, thus helping them to collectively overcome barriers in their collegiate environment. A sense of community allowed these Black males to embrace the notion that they are not alone in their struggles and, just as important, they are not alone in their resilience. To know that there are others who can relate to your adversity and who have always refused to quit because their resilience would not allow them to is empowering and motivating.

Marshall described how the community kept him and other EOF students going because of their shared experiences:

What keeps people going is being able to say oh there were homeless people that were EOP students, people that lost their parents, or their parents were, you know, addicted to drugs, all this. And they had the grit and resilience to overcome this. So, you know you are part of a legacy of people that started from the bottom and now are here.

Dionne Shabazz described the way in which resilience was fostered by EOF through relationships, which included everything from feeling included in a network or feeling embraced by a family.

I think about some of the most important people during my tenure at school and still have a relationship with them, connecting with them, talking them through highs and lows, through difficult decisions, etcetera. And so, it's this kind of network if you will. But it's really like family is formed where this undertone of support is the bare minimum of what we do. That's what we do for each other, right? We're not asking anybody to give anybody a handout, but we support each other. You know this, some students that I'd never even went to school with, but I know them through my EOF mentors and we're

connecting, sending emails, we're doing invitations. And we try to provide opportunities for each other. We try to leave doors open for each other or open doors for each other. And I think that's encouraging in terms of being resilient. Being able to have those relationships though with people that I think have similar experiences to say "Hey let's give this a shot."

Ernest King reflected on how these shared experiences, even traumatic ones, were the motivation for him to not dwell on his problems and to instead push forward.

So, for me, it was the community piece. Sometimes talking to folks who have been through worse, and they have transcended, you're like dang [wow]. Whether it be upperclassmen, staff members, or people in your peer group, people have transcended various aspects of their lives that you may perceive to be tougher than yours. And you're like, "Yo, you're still standing." I can get up and go to class at 7:00 am or 8:00 am. It's like I don't have issues. That's a real problem [what they are experiencing]. So, for me, it was like, this may be pervasive, but it's like a shared trauma. So, to speak of what folks have been through, and it kind of puts your place in an ecosystem, so to speak, "Um, I'm not that bad."

The data has also revealed that this sense of community has not helped these individuals during college to become resilient but even post-grad and how for some they are even able to foster community in their quest to help others be more resilient, such as the case with Andrew Hughes who works as an educator in the same environment he grew up in and his students face the same challenges that he faced due to their socioeconomic status.

You know I mentioned it before. I'm someone who relates to people through lived experiences. I try to be as vulnerable as possible when it comes to people that I see something in or if I have a role to be supportive to a group of people, that's what I'm going to do. But personally, I like students like that. Those are my favorite students; the ones who you know have those issues with resiliency. You know they may have a bit of sadness behind their eyes because it's like I've been there. I know what it feels like, you know.

Adding to this sense of shared experience and community helping their ability to bounce back were the targeted male leadership programs offered through EOF in which most of these Black males participated:

The brotherhood came first and then the support. The students that were in the Male Leadership Academy we were already, you know, acquaintances but then we became a brotherhood as far as you know, having those weekly meetings, everybody describing how their week went and you know we were seeing that our weeks are similar. You know they're different scenarios, but the backbone is similar. And you know, just having that support, we had the group chat, it was not always serious. So, you know, we had fun, and it actually gave you a reason to want to go back to the next meeting because we had that brotherhood there.

MLA was very specific to me in terms of skillsets that I think are needed for me. But also struggles, and you know the specific things we have to deal with in our identity. Like we talked about some real stuff. Just some of the things that we [Black men] were facing that people may know about, that may be on the news. And also, the things that are personal, this is what I'm dealing with that nobody would really know. And I don't know if there were any other spaces that I guess gave you room to shed light on what that's like in our community and in doing that, like trying to be leaders and be support systems for us specifically, that was strong.

I didn't want to do it [participate in EOF MLA] at first. I walked away from the program. I was arrogant at the time. I didn't want to listen to anyone. I didn't think I needed a program to be better. Then I saw what the program was doing for other people. Once I joined, I think it gave me more exposure than anything else. It put me in a space where other guys, other Black males; to see a group of people wanting to be better is one thing, but as a Black man to see a group of Blacks who want to be better [is another thing]. It pushed me ten times harder. I mean they weren't from Camden, but they were from Newark, Trenton, Irvington, Patterson, basically the same places and to see them want to be better that made me want to be better. Um, we were pushed to be better.

EOF programs at both Sojourner and Douglass University helped to foster resilience within Black males by helping them to become aware of and define the resilience that they had prior to them attending college, helping them to see that their trauma and adversity, which had made them resilient also made them independent and that independence was sometimes not allowing them to see that resilient people can also be vulnerable and trust others to help them, actually helping these Black males so that trust would not be broken and then providing a community for them with other resilient Black males with shared experiences so that they could support and

build each other up as they navigated their collegiate environment while dealing with challenges, academically, socially and personally.

Themes

In addition to the research questions that this study answered, the findings from this study revealed 5 broad themes with sub-themes to further illustrate each of those themes. Each of these themes gave greater insight into how the resilience of these Black males formed, how college presented more barriers for them to be resilient to, and how EOF helped them to persevere in comparison to the institution at large. Each theme that was identified was explained through quotes from the participants interviewed, allowing the study to successfully illustrate the narratives of the participants. The themes selected are directly related to the research questions and align with the research data. The five highlighted themes are (a) environmental instability, (b) self-sufficiency, (c) awareness of resilience, (d) EOF support, and (e) racial barriers.

Theme 1: Environmental Instability

The participants in this study were all from low-income towns or neighborhoods within their towns which presented a host of environmental issues that lead to an overwhelming majority of the participants dealing with environmental instability. This environmental instability was present not only in the community itself but within the home. Examples of environmental stability illustrated through the narratives of the participants include but are not limited to crime and violence in the neighborhood, homelessness, lack of parental guidance, absenteeism of one or both parents, abuse from parents, and substance abuse by parents. These environmental factors not only led to a lack of stability financially and emotionally for the participants but were things growing up that helped to build resilience within the participants. They represented barriers that

they had to learn to overcome and bounce back from at a very young age. In the words of Doc Owens,

Growing up we moved around a lot due to having to go to different apartments, from being evicted and not being able to keep up with bills or stuff like that. Um, I've experienced lights being off, not knowing where my next meal is gonna come from.

We were in a violent area for about 3 years, uh towards the end, like the last year my mom went back to Camden. So, I was pretty much living in violence with my cousins by myself."

This instability hugely impacted Andrews Hughes, who reflected on the instability that plagued his childhood, forcing him to become resilient so young:

Uh, well you know I, I uh, grew up in a household with a mother and father who both struggled with uh, substance abuse . . . Uh you know, just being transparent, like, you know, I spent some time just like dibbling into, you know, street life, like it was a big distraction for me . . . I was a knucklehead, rebellious, much like a lot of other teens growing up in urban environments. . . . I felt like my parents let me down. Um you know, why am I 13 years old having to live with my older brother instead of my mother and father? Um, you know, why can't, you know, I call my dad and was like, where is he? Like why when I go to visit, I'm staying at a halfway house with them. Um and just the understanding that those things were the reality to me.

Parental presence or lack thereof continued to be a form of instability that made things extremely difficult for these participants, as they learned to navigate their childhood without the support or presence of their parents in their lives:

I would say that links to my parents just not being around. They worked a lot, so we pretty much raised ourselves, and our parents were the protectors in the sense of, like, we had a roof over our heads and clothes to wear but everything else at the emotional connection that parents, uh, give, wasn't there, not because they didn't want to, they just, you know, they were working. (Anthony Marshall)

Living with other people that's not my parents, my mother wasn't around, and she was in the streets. Um, also my father wasn't around. I don't really know exactly who he may be . . . So, I would say the biggest thing is parents not being there and me living with someone else that's not a parent or guardian because even with my grandmother who is related to me, I didn't live with her that long. Then I moved to my sister's grandmother which helped me out in the long run. (James Dubois)

Um, my father wasn't around in my life in my early childhood. So, it was definitely difficult navigating life without having a father figure in that regard. Um, as my father moved into my life as a full-term parent, um, that became tough. He was abusive. Um physically, he was sexually abusive towards my sister. Um, him and my mother were both verbally abusive. My mother worked a lot of the time. Um, so we didn't have too much of her presence as much as I would have liked. She was busy working all the time. (Rasheed McKay)

Familial disorganization was limited to the parents because either the loss or lack of presence with other important family members was something that these Black males dealt with.

Something that haunted James Dubois and Doc Owens, individuals who had to be resilient to the loss of older brothers due to gun violence. Owens mentioned how his loss caused them to have to be nomads once again, causing further instability for the sake of a safe environment:

When I was in the seventh grade, I lost my brother to gun violence. Um, he had been in and out of jail for some time. So, our relationship was like, we were building a relationship at the time. I lost him and that's when I had to, well that's when we left, we moved.

This theme is of significant importance to this study as it aligns with the resilience of these participants. These Black males mentioned that resilience was not an option for them and was something that they have always had to maintain, even if they lacked the awareness of what resilience is. They always had to be resilient because they have always had instability present in their lives in some form or another. Therefore, when coming to college and dealing with barriers they faced, whether they were educational, racial, or financial, those things just represented another form of instability that they would have to figure out how to overcome.

Theme 2: Self Sufficiency

Another theme that emerged in the data was that with a direct correlation to the themes of instability was that of self-sufficiency. As a result of the instability that these Black males lived with, the instability that had always been present in their youth, they learned the importance of independence and how their self-sufficiency was not only crucial to their resilience but their

survival. We see through their narratives that this self-sufficiency manifested itself in several distinct ways; no support, lack of trust in others, figuring things out on their own, making adult decisions as a kid, contingency plans, and the inability to ask for or seek help.

Um, and I think from there, what ends up happening for me is that you begin to develop a. Uh, contingency plan for everything, in any event, that things don't go right. So, in that space, it was like, because I've experienced things as a kid that most kids my age didn't, I was better suited and better prepared to deal with hardships going forward. (Ernest King)

I felt like I would never be able to rely on anyone for support, for help, for guidance. Like I would have to figure it out on my own, all of it, no matter what it was, all the time. Uh, I think that was a big one. That's something I think it's, uh even going through adulthood, I'm in my thirties now, and that's something I had to unlearn. How to trust, depend on people, and things like that. . . . Even more difficult to actually ask or receive help than to struggle and do it yourself. (Dione Shabazz)

I just started doing things on my own. (Howard Louis)

It really caused me to have to make adult decisions as a child. (Andrew Hughes)

Ultimately a lot of those decisions, you know, just having to wake for school, um iron my clothes, make breakfast, things that you know your parents would be the ones who kind of do those things for you. I noticed I had to take on that role for myself very early on.

I started catching public transportation in the third grade. I could barely read. I was getting on the wrong bus sometimes. So, the bus driver used to charge me a dollar and sometimes I ain't have the dollar on me. So, I got off the bus and had to walk home. I was in third grade. I got to walk two miles to get home. You know how crazy that is? (Andrew Hughes)

I'd have to deal with those things by myself. It became more challenging as I got older. (Andrew Hughes)

This self-sufficiency impacted their ability to be resilient in their collegiate environments, as they had lived lives figuring things out on their own, in many cases not trusting the support that may have been available to them. Now in college, when a huge part of being able to bounce back from setbacks and overcome the barriers presented to them is based on their ability to receive help, they struggled. This meant the EOF professionals working with them had to also deal with the impact of their self-sufficient mindsets and ways of conducting themselves. As mentioned

earlier in this chapter it was that awareness of how their independence affected their ability to persist in this environment that allowed them to address and see that resilience and interdependence are mutually exclusive; they could coexist in the same space.

Theme 3: Awareness of Resilience

Awareness of resilience was a theme that had a direct impact on how EOF programs fostered resilience among Black males in their programs. The awareness of resilience allowed Black males to define themselves in a way that was deficit minded. Yes, they had come from challenging and “disadvantaged” backgrounds, the latter a term that is all too familiar to Black males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. However, an awareness of their resilience gives them the ability to not be defined by those disadvantages but by the very thing that had helped them to thrive and overcome those disadvantages. A great deal was discussed earlier in this chapter on this awareness of resilience that EOF had made possible for Black males, yet it is still worth discussing as the many adverse situations that these Black males were exposed to make them resilient their entire lives though they did not really embrace and understand until college. Additional commentary from interviews with these participants substantiates this further.

I couldn't keep asking myself that, but like, I wasn't like I'm about to be resilient and do this or do that. It was just something where I was like, I have to do something to actually, you know, move forward, move on, try to progress. So, it wasn't something where it was like I'm being resilient, but it wasn't where I didn't like the circumstance I was in. So, I had to try to find some action to, you know, prevail or, you know, succeed in something. (James Dubois)

Um, I would have to say once I got into college. So, it was at a point where it was like, I made it through a lot of stuff, but then I had to reflect, like, I made it through a lot of stuff that I never knew that you know I made it through in a sense of me being resilient. So, I would have to say college because that's when that was the pivotal moment right there. (James Dubois)

Um, I always grew up with my sister, the majority of my childhood, so that just became like trying to be a source of strength for her and being a source of levity for my family overall. So, I really didn't think that about being resilient, but I always kind of tried to

carry myself in these ways and be strong for my family, regardless of how I may have been feeling. (Rasheed McKay)

Um, I think getting into college was the ultimate goal for me. Like, just getting myself there. So, whatever it took, I just felt like not getting there wasn't an option 'cause I didn't really have an escape. So, if that was resilience, then that's just what you call it. (Rasheed McKay)

Theme 4: EOF Support

One of the purposes of this study was to examine the role that EOF programs play in helping Black males from low-income backgrounds foster and utilize their resilience. However, the data also illustrates something else as it relates to how supportive and instrumental EOF was to the success of these Black males at their respective institutions. The data reveals that EOF was more instrumental in the university itself in assisting these Black males, with many of them only connecting their support and assistance with EOF and not the institution as a whole. There's even a sense of sorrow expressed to those who were not EOF as they truly missed out on something that the institution overall could not offer. As Doc Owens described, EOF was extremely paramount in being able to address his issues and problems that the University itself may have been very limited in helping him with.

I don't know (how the institution itself helped people from different backgrounds) because I didn't get any help if it wasn't outside of EOF. I mean there was like, Dean Gary and uh Chris Cottle but outside of like that, there was no other help. I didn't know. And even with those connections, they were through EOF. Um, so like, if it weren't for that, I wouldn't have those connections. I wouldn't know of those connections. I would say. So, like taking away EOF, I don't know.

Um literally like everything, Um but one of the immediate, so I brought up not having money for food at the end of the semester, Um EOF helped with that, the food insecurity, whether it was stuff like they had there or giving me some extra meal cards so I can go to Fredericks' [dining hall].

I think from day one, EOF was like, one of the people they told me I was going to be great, you know, um, Dr. Jean has this thing of calling all of his students scholars and I think that really did change my mindset.

Overall, EOF has been the biggest consistent in my life. Um, and that was huge for me, just the biggest thing.

I was able to open up to them, which in turn helped me open up to everyone else. I was able to trust them, which helped me trust other people.

James Dubois saw the program as one that prevented other barriers from forming and presenting themselves, thus making it a little less difficult for him and others: "Like if I wasn't at EOP, it would have been a whole bunch more barriers. It was like, no keys to unlock the door."

Testimonials from other participants continued to validate this claim that EOF was a resource that trumped whatever the institutions themselves could offer these Black males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, literally helping them with everything, even the barriers posed by the institution itself. In response to the question of what the institution did to help students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, he said,

It would be difficult to answer that question without EOP, honestly. Even um with the example I gave with the RA, you know, making that false claim that we did this, you know, it was that the EOP counselors got involved to, you know, help me walk through it.

To be honest Reg, like, I always felt really bad for those kids. Like the kids who didn't have that, that experience in EOF, because, you know it really took them a while to find that connection with folks. I made a lot of friends that weren't in the program and uh they were all very envious of the experience that we got and just having the conversation now I can see that, like we walked in with a whole team behind us.

Dr. Jean was gracious enough to provide me with studio time, you know, that was just an amazing moment. And uh, really inspired me to just tap into more like a creative and just being, you know, thoughtful of like how powerful my words are. Even just being vulnerable because I did utilize poetry as a way to talk about my personal life. You know, I touched on things that happened to me as a child, like, you know, just growing up with a mother who has substance abuse problems, or like growing up in a home that just wasn't the norm, right? I didn't grow up in a nuclear family. But I feel like just those very, uh, thoughtful like steps that you guys took to um nurture my talents is something that you know has pushed me. (James Hughes)

Um. I think, uh one of the things that you know, really stands out to me, is uh just being mindful of your capabilities, as you know an adult, uh, really took me some time to understand, like what the heck I wanted to do after college. Um, but you guys did a very

good job with me in the program. It's just reminding me like, yo, you have something special in you right? Like there's something there, like you know, we don't know what you're going to do with it, but you do have something that can transfer." (Dione Shabazz)

So, like it was these, these guard rails you know so to speak, to kind of help you get back to where you needed to go. But we also had academics, we had our EOP advisors, slash uh, academic coaches who were also very invested in who you are as a person and a student, and wanted to make sure you achieve. So, there was a great amount of academic resources that were coming from the EOP program as a collective, but also from different people within it. Uh, both staff and students were willing to help." (Ernest King)

So if it weren't for EOP, if I was just a regular kid that somehow got accepted to Rider, because you know, we want to give them a second chance, but there weren't these systems in place like EOF, I wouldn't ever survive because I would've walked away thinking, look man, they made a mistake. I would see they made a mistake. Cause I don't know any of this. I'm out. EOF was so good at saying like, look, man, the whole purpose of you starting in the summer is because like, we know there's going to be things, there's going to be culture shock, in your learning and in your environment and we're trying to prepare you for that. So, in any aspect, uh that you know, like come across that is scary to you, you have someone that you can talk to. And I just embraced that, you know I opened myself up to not being ashamed of my weaknesses and knowing they were going to teach me, that uh, the tools. I had to be patient with myself, and they had to be patient with me. (Anthony Marshall)

Um, they helped a lot, honestly. Um anytime I needed something or even financially, academically, is like they always provided a person to go to like somebody that was working closely with EOP or EOF." (James Dubois)

When asked how EOF helped him address the challenges he faced in college, Rasheed McKay simply answers "That could have been the only question you asked." This response reveals just how involved EOF was in helping him bounce back from the barriers that could've stifled or completely shut down his progress, so they have so many non-EOF students, particularly Black males. He then goes on to describe just some of the ways that EOF was impactful to him overcoming the obstacles and beating the odds:

A lot, a lot. I had a lot of problems and then just kind of felt like there wasn't one issue that I ever had in college that I couldn't come to EOF with. Um in the beginning of my freshman year, I didn't think I needed that much help. Um so it was great that I got close to you, but I really didn't know how that would benefit me. Um, tying into all my other stuff. I had all of these emotional issues, um diagnosed, depressed and I really don't

know who to talk to. Um, I started coming to you more and more and our relationship grew stronger and stronger, um, to the point where I'm just in your office tissue box in full use. And I'm just goin in. Um, and that was when I realized, like, how grateful I was for how close our relationship was because I didn't know I would need it to be as strong as it was. I didn't know of anybody else on campus, especially a professional that I trusted enough to disclose so much of what I did to you. Um, but I knew you were there, and I trusted you. Um, so that was a huge milestone.

It is important to highlight the unwavering and unique support that EOF provided these Black males, as it allowed them to trust and be vulnerable with others to receive the help they needed on a variety of issues. As one of the quotes from the participants mentions, EOF was the most consistent thing in his life. That's tremendously powerful when we are talking about individuals who have only known instability their entire lives and that a program would come to represent stability and consistency for them. Furthermore, when the institution itself is presenting the barriers that you have to be resilient to, it can be quite tone deaf and insensitive to require them to turn to that same institution for help. When these Black males do not see that their institutions are their greatest source of help so that they can bounce back from setbacks and overcome barriers, where are they supposed to turn? When their self-sufficiency is still not allowing them to thrive in this environment, who helps them? It is clear through the data that Black males in EOF programs at predominantly White institutions would say EOF.

Theme 5: Racial Barriers

In a study that asked Black males at a predominantly White institution to discuss the barriers they faced, it is not surprising that racial barriers would not only be one of the answers to the research questions but also show up in the data as a major theme. This theme of racial barriers being present at the institutions of attendance has been a result of individual and systemic issues that Black males have had to face from the moment they arrived on these campuses. These racial barriers presented themselves in the data in the form of social

acclimation issues, lack of Black faculty and staff, culturally incompetent professors, acts of racism and discrimination, racial profiling/criminalization, and microaggressions. All of these barriers impacted not only the experiences of these students but represented issues that they had to be resilient to. Their illustration of these various barriers has been highlighted in the data presented, additional confirmation of testimonials mentioned in answering research question number one.

Then the fall hits. And then it, like, slapped you in the face. Like, well wait a minute, we're just a small small small um, population and it became very concerning at a time that you really couldn't adjust. So, all the reservations became fear. Um, and it was hard to kind of like say, yo, I'm scared to be here. (Anthony Marshall)

I don't belong here. That was it. . . . I think there was like some racist activity my freshmen year as well, like racial slurs and whatnot happening on campus. . . . Right, and so people like myself, like, we're actually living in that activity every day and they may or may not know that they're being racist, uh with microaggressions or whatnot, but they are. (Dione Shabazz)

As a Black person, you have a bit of uphill climbing to do, but it wasn't until I began to experience in the classroom, like, my peers being discriminated against. . . . Even socially when it came to going to the back of campus for a social event. And it was like Greek-only meetings that Greek Life is affiliated with, you know, more of the mainstream white fraternities and sororities. And then I was able to have the opportunity of joining a Black fraternity, being met with the same challenge of it's Greek only. It's like Oh I'm Greek and it's them being like nah but not your kind." (Ernest King)

Conclusion

The data reveals and illustrates that financial and racial barriers were significant hurdles for the participants during their tenure at these PWIs. These financial and racial barriers represented additional adverse situations that these participants had become accustomed to dealing with since they had spent their childhoods overcoming adverse circumstances, highlighted by environmental instability and financial hardships. The data revealed that their life at a PWI came with new challenges, especially as it related to the racial climate of the institutions, in and out of the classroom. While acclimation and social integration and essential to

the retention of students at colleges and universities, as highlighted by Tinto's theoretical frameworks, we see through the lens of Critical Race Theory that this acclimation is not as easy for Black males at PWIs as the institutions and systemic racism make that integration yet another hurdle for these Black males.

Resilience then becomes a way for these Black males to overcome those barriers, and their EOF programs helped them do just that. The participants acknowledged that their EOF programs were instrumental in them using their resilience as a way to matriculate and acclimate at these institutions. These programs first helped them to identify themselves as resilient. They then forced them to look at the ways in which their resilient nature had helped them and also created other obstacles for them in regard to their inability to trust and seek help. Finally, these programs then showed them ways and methods to overcome these barriers while using their adverse experiences of their past as a way to motivate them with their current adverse situations at the PWIs they attended.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

A summary of the findings presented in this study highlights several key points as it relates to the resilience and persistence of low-income Black males at predominantly White institutions. First, while we know that the participants of this study are coming from backgrounds that provided many adverse situations that required them to be resilient, we must not assume that Black males are aware of the resilience they possess. This is what has made their respected EOF programs instrumental in the stewardship of that resilience, as something that these Black males always had now has a name and the recognizance of this phenomenon has great intrinsic value.

For those that are aware of their resilience, it is worth discussing that assumptions can be made for them, as well. First, there's the assumption that they'll simply be able to apply the resilience that had brought them this far to their new environments. A familiarity came with their home environments and neighborhoods that not only normalized their dysfunction and trauma but also made it routine and something they learned to live with and expect. A predominantly White institution was in fact something completely different to them and represented a challenge that they had not faced before, leaving them unsure of how their resilience would work here. Once again, we see through their testimonies that the EOF programs again assisted them in helping them to remember that they were resilient while also showing them how to be resilient in this new environment and the barriers that came along with it. Testimonies like those from Andrew Hughes highlight the role EOF played in helping students be resilient in this new environment.

I mean you know through those 4 years that I was at Sojourner, I'd be lying if I said that there weren't dark times. You know, I did go through a lot of struggles, but at the same time, I found a way out. And a lot of those reasons was because I had you guys to actually talk to, or just like, you know, pull me out of whatever slump I was in. Um and you know I've been able to internalize that to the point where I feel comfortable being able to do those things on my own now, but I wouldn't, I wouldn't be able to do that if I didn't have that initial support from you guys.

Finally, as it relates to the resilience of these Black males, we must also be willing to discuss this powerful motivator that we applaud these Black males for possessing as their super strength also has kryptonite power and potential if not addressed. So many of the adverse conditions that these Black males had been exposed to and had to overcome forced them to become extremely independent, guarded, and untrusting of others. These traits had the potential to impede their ability to persevere in college as that was an environment that required them to seek and rely on help while being vulnerable and open in an effort to overcome the various obstacles they faced there.

Mistrust of higher education professionals and seeking their help have now become barriers that have to be overcome and thus negate much of the resilient nature that has helped them prior to this stage in their lives. What we found was that through their interactions with EOF staff, they eventually learned that the survival mode mentality that had served them well for so long was not going to be the sole factor in their success at these predominantly White institutions. They could not grit their way through this journey as they had to learn to trust, take direction, seek help, share their experiences, embrace the community, and even be mentored. All of these things happened at EOF, and its Male Leadership Academy gave them new ways of looking at their resilience and incorporating new information to complement their resilience in an effort to overcome the challenges that came with being low-income Black males at a PWI.

Racism

First, institutions have to recognize and become aware of the systemic racism that is found in its very structuring and design. This also means institutions having to look at things through the lens of CRT, as uncomfortable as that may be to really understand that though most of the individuals working there are not racist the institution is a byproduct of and has benefited from racism. These institutions are predominantly White because they were founded for White students and did not start opening their doors to Black students in large numbers until they were forced to and until opportunity programs such as EOF were planted on their campuses. So, while the last 50 to 60 years have allowed them to be more accessible to low-income Black males, that accessibility does not mean equity or equality, especially when there are policies and people there that are a part of the problem. The mere fact that Black students are receiving an education in an environment where they are marginalized and forced to look for support and assistance from a small number of individuals that look like them and share their experiences, is a perfect illustration of the systemic barriers that predominantly White institutions pose to Black male students.

As the findings have shown, community is key to helping these Black males channel their resilience and overcome institutional barriers. However, that becomes increasingly more difficult when they perceive that they have no community there to begin with. When students talk about being marginalized in the classroom and the impact that can have on their success, it is even more damaging when they cannot find that support among faculty and staff because the faculty and staff there are also marginalized. As Dione Shabazz pointed out, the lack of Black faculty and staff only made him feel more marginalized. "So, I have this constant everyday feeling like I don't belong, right? There were maybe even a few professors or administrators that look like me,

uh, outside the EOF department. So, like, even being able to see that the connection was not there, had it not been for EOP."

PWIs can no longer ignore the "White" in that classification and the impact that whiteness has on the experiences of Black males at those institutions. These institutions can no longer be afraid to own the fact that racism is a part of the experience for these males no matter how subtle or overt. The microaggressions, cultural insensitivity, biases, and discrimination they faced were made possible because these institutions were founded and allowed to thrive because of those very things. Ernst King summed up his experience with racism at Douglass while referring to an incident that had involved his girlfriend at the time. She had had someone write something racist and derogatory on her door and the school refused to do anything about it until students pressured them to act in some way.

I'm not sure if she [the student who had written the comments] was expelled or not, but I do believe that it came from internal pressure from students to make that happen. Black students were incredibly frustrated about the inaction from the place that we're paying 45K plus per year to attend. I reflect on that even just now, thinking I haven't thought about this for years, but I just remember the frustration that me and my peers had. So how are we supposed to walk around on campus knowing that there are people who feel this way about us and there's nothing really happening.

The acknowledgment of how these institutions are inherently racist is an important first step and certainly worth the discussion, but it is not the ultimate solution, as actions to these concerns raised via discussion must occur, especially in today's more social justice-driven college climate where inaction is viewed as compliance and agreement with the injustice.

Implications

The findings highlighted that racial and financial barriers were two things to which Black males in EOF programs at PWIs had to be resilient, and their EOF programs assisted them in recognizing and fostering that resilience. The following implications for practice are centered on

what institutions can do to recognize and rectify the barriers to which Black males at these places must be resilient and how greater support can be given to opportunity programs like EOF to help them continue to achieve success with these Black males at PWIs.

Racial Barriers

This awareness of how the institution itself serves as a barrier to Black males means that PWIs must engage in more aggressive recruiting of qualified Black males to work not only at these institutions but with these Black males. In addition to creating an environment that would allow for greater acclimation and support by hiring more Black faculty and staff, institutions must be willing to look at policies and procedures that disproportionately impact Black males and rectify those issues, as well. For example, the findings highlighted examples of conduct that played out to the disadvantage of these Black males. Whether it was Residential Assistants (RAs) responsible for enforcing the codes and conduct of the residence halls or the campus police responsible for enforcing codes of conduct that keep a campus safe, colleges and universities have to be willing to examine if these regulatory positions and departments are reflective of their student body and operating in a way that is fair and equitable to all of its students, particularly Black males.

These regulatory bodies cannot simply be another representation of what these Black males have already experienced in their systemically racist world outside of college. The problem goes beyond simply hiring more Black male RAs, security officers, police officers, and other conduct paraprofessionals and professionals. Rather, it includes greater diversity and inclusion training for its non-Black officials and employees that also occupy these positions. Furthermore, it also means being willing to, revise, dismantle and do away with policies and procedures that disproportionately impact Black males on their campuses.

Programs tailored exclusively towards Black males at PWIs must be developed and coordinated by these universities in an effort to address the racial barriers they're facing. These programs should not only be focused on leadership but should ultimately look into the resilience of these Black males and how that can be stewarded in helping them navigate their experiences there and ultimately utilize all resources to help themselves overcome them. Participants mentioned how the community established in the Male Leadership Academy gave them opportunities to be resilient together and how much more resilient they felt knowing that their struggles at these PWIs were not singular experiences. PWIs must be strategic in providing Black males with and involving them in ethnic-based organizations with other students (Simmons, 2013).

Financial Barriers

We see from the data that financial barriers were definitely hurdles that Black males in these opportunity programs for low-income students had to be resilient to. We also see that many felt that it was only their EOF program that helped them with these barriers and thus allowed them to persist. Institutions have to figure out ways to address these barriers that plague their low-income students, especially knowing that Black males carry so many burdens when it comes to financial assistance. Institutions must be willing to subsidize costs that prove to be barriers for low-income students. For example, a yearly housing fee that has to be paid to secure housing for the following year is typically between \$200 and \$400. For these Black males on campus in income-based opportunity programs like EOF, there need to be subsidies or waivers that make this one less barrier these students will have to worry about. The data highlighted testimonials from Black males who were independent students with permanent residences who were struggling with food insecurity. If these students do not have the \$20 needed for a meal, it is safe

to conclude that the \$200 needed for securing your room will also be a challenge. Then there are independent low-income Black males like James Dubois who need more than subsidies but also assistance from their universities to ensure that they can have their housing needs met year-round and that their university is willing to partner with them to ensure that they are offered some stability during their tenure at the university.

EOF Support

EOF support is crucial to ensuring that Black males in EOF programs at PWIs are provided with the resources they need to aid their resilience. The support implicated here is by way of the universities where these EOF programs are housed. Universities cannot afford to limit or cut support to these programs when they saw the value of these programs, especially as it relates to the success of Black males. The findings revealed that many participants had no help or could not identify where their help was outside of EOF. Furthermore, their testimonials showed that any resources that they acquainted themselves with outside of EOF came as a result of EOF. Last, the findings revealed that EOF for most of them represented the most important, consistent, and valuable resource that they had at their disposal and how it was their EOF program that really helped them give power to their own resilience. Institutions must be willing to place financial support behind EOF programs so that they can add more low-income Black males to their programs.

Not all low-income Black males at these institutions are EOF students, as these programs can only fund so many students. This is where institutional support is necessary. Even if it involves adding just 5–10 more Black males to the program each year, that is 5–10 more Black males who would be on these campuses without EOF, increasing the likelihood that they may not stay at these institutions. The failure of institutions to address these aforementioned areas has

dire implications for the fate of low-income Black males at PWIs. We know through the literature and national data that this is a group of college students with the lowest retention rates, so in order to improve those rates, these things have to be addressed and changes must be made.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study worth highlighting. These limitations include the sample size of these participants, as these participants only make up a small percentage of the Black males on these campuses and thus highlight only a fraction of the experiences that they faced. The participants also represented individuals who had overcome significant barriers before their enrollment, thus leaving more research to be done with and around Black males who were not as successful in overcoming barriers as a result of adverse childhood experiences.

I also studied Black males who had participated actively in their respective EOF programs so further research can be conducted with Black males who are not a part of opportunity programs like EOF or do did not fully engage in their EOF programs, thus impacting their resilience to the financial and racial adversity they faced on a college campus.

The EOF program itself also represents a limitation to the study as these programs are not race programs but are, in fact, opportunity programs for students who have strong financial needs and academic under-preparedness. All of these participants fulfilled these criteria, but there are many Black males on college campuses who do not. Furthermore, one cannot assume that every PWI in the state of NJ does not have other opportunity programs like EOFs, though the ones in this study did not.

Finally, I am an EOF student who has worked professionally for this program for almost 20 years, so bias for the program and its worth and value could be implied. EOF professionals tend to be former EOF students who have a strong affinity and bond with the program thus

allowing them to pour into the program and the students within the program. This connection to the program gives them an automatic advantage in dealing with the population that this program services, especially when it comes to Black male EOF professionals working with Black male EOF students.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research hinge on the two things that this study has highlighted most: resilience and EOF. While research on the resilience of Black males, even in the realm of higher education, is nothing new, research on how multifaceted resilience is for Black males is limited. Research should explore how Black males understand and weaponize their own resilience and even explore the setbacks, negative effects, and shortcomings of resilience. The participants, shedding light on how their normalized trauma left them with issues that resilience only masked but could not address, showed that there is more to resilience than simply getting through adversity or bouncing back from it. Are we really exploring the condition that these resilient individuals are left having to bounce back from? Last, as it relates to resilience, further research should be done in exploring resilience as a plural experience for Black males at PWIs and not simply a singular one. The testimonials of these participants suggest that their independent journeys eventually morphed into something more collective and the communal environments that their EOF programs provided them also did something for their resilience.

EOF programs in New Jersey were also the highlight of this study. The value and sheer transformational power of these programs call for greater research to examine, highlight and possibly replicate their effectiveness. Programs with the impact that this study has highlighted should not be ignored, as their over 50 years of service to NJ's poorest and most challenged

college students need to be made known. While this study is focused on how these programs assisted Black males at PWIs in stewarding their resilience, we found through these participants that these programs do so much more. Therefore, more research should be conducted on the effectiveness of these programs in helping low-income Black males at PWIs remain resilient to the racial and financial barriers they face.

Last, more research should be conducted on those low-income Black male EOF students at PWIs who have not successfully completed their undergraduate degrees. While this study interviewed eight participants who did, it's still more to be discovered about those who did not. Were these individuals who were not resilient in their adverse childhood experiences thus impacting their resilience in college? Did these students not allow themselves to be assisted by their EOF programs due to the overlooked negative impact of their resilient childhood? Were there too many financial barriers for them to overcome no matter how resilient they were? Did the racial barriers at PWIs cause them to leave or transfer because they did not want to deal with them? These questions would ultimately be answered with further research that explores the experiences of low-income Black males who were not retained at their respective PWIs.

Conclusion

The fundamental purpose of this study was to identify the major barriers for low-income Black males at PWIs, while also exploring the role that both their resilience and EOF programs played in being able to overcome these barriers and finish their collegiate journey. The findings from this study, which were gathered through eight individual interviews with Black males who attended PWIs via EOF programs, have illustrated that low-income Black males in these programs face huge barriers towards their successful completion of a degree by way of financial roadblocks and a systemic racist environment. The findings also reveal that though these

individuals are resilient due to the adverse childhood experiences they have endured, they are still in need of their respected EOF programs to help them understand their resilience and how to use it to their advantage in this environment. Furthermore, institutions must not only eliminate these barriers but must support programs on campus, such as EOF, so that greater work can be done in the efforts to assist Black males on their campuses.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings _____

I hope all is well. My name is Reggie Walker and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Studies Department at Saint Peter's University. Due to your participation in the EOF Program and the EOF Male Leadership Academy, I enthusiastically invite you to participate in a research study that will serve as the basis for the research of my doctoral dissertation.

The title of my dissertation is Relying on Resiliency: The Intrinsic Weapon for Black Male Success in Opportunity Programs at Predominantly White Institutions. This qualitative study will aim to give Black male EOF students and alum the opportunity to describe their experiences at a PWI and what role, if any, the EOF program played in fostering resiliency within these students as means of helping them overcome the barriers they faced while attending college. The study also will allow the participants to describe what role the institution played, if any, in fostering resilience as a means of helping them.

Your protection and privacy are paramount so I will utilize pseudonyms so that your identity is protected. In fact, all identifying information will be protected through the use of pseudonyms; this includes your educational background, the name of your institution, and other identifying information. Since I will interview participants, copies of transcripts will be given to you to give you the opportunity to ensure that all information collected is accurate. If you are familiar with the dissertation process, you will know that the dissertation process is guided and revised by a committee. My dissertation committee consists of two faculty members from Saint Peter's University and one faculty member from Brookdale Community College. Information collected will be shared with these individuals.

I hope that this email has provided you with enough information and that you would accept my invitation to participate in my student and contribute to what I believe will be significant research regarding the worthiness of opportunity programs like EOF.

If you have any questions, comments, and concerns regarding the study please feel free to reply to this email or contact me at 609-851-4572. I have cc'd my dissertation chair on this email and have also included her contact information below.

Dr. Beth Castiglia
Saint Peter's University
College of Education

bcastiglia@saintpeters.edu

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Reggie R. Walker
Ed. D Candidate
Saint Peter's University C/O 2021

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FORM

I am asking you to participate in a research study titled “Relying on Resilience: The Intrinsic Weapon for Black Males in Opportunity Programs at Predominantly White Institutions.” I will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. This study is being led by Reggie Walker, Educational Leadership Department at Saint Peter's University. The Faculty Advisor for this study is Dr. Beth Castiglia, Educational Leadership Department at Saint Peter's University.

What the study is about

The purpose of this research is to examine the role that resiliency plays in the success of Black male students who attend predominantly White institutions via the Educational Opportunity Fund Program. The research aims to find out what barriers were present that the students needed to be resilient to and how the EOF program at the institution helped them to be resilient to and overcome these barriers.

What we will ask you to do

I will ask you to participate in a one-on-one interview with me. During this interview, which will be no longer than 60 mins, you will be asked a series of questions on your personal and college experiences that required you to be resilient in addition to questions about your experiences as an EOF student and participant in its Male Leadership Academy.

Risks and discomforts

Because you will be asked about childhood experiences that you had to be resilient to, which may be traumatic experiences, there are emotional risks involved with this study (e.g., anxiety, feelings of sadness, feelings of anger, etc.).

Benefits

There are possible indirect benefits for you as a participant as your reflection of your own experience may lead to a better understanding of yourself and increase your self-efficacy. Information from this study may directly benefit EOF programs and the students they serve as the study has the potential to lend to the credibility and worthiness of these programs and why they should continue to be supported.

Compensation for participation

Participants will not receive compensation for their participation in this study.

Audio/Video Recording

Interviews will be recorded as audio recordings will assist me in making sure that all information is recorded accurately. Audio recordings will be used for transcription and will be discarded five years after the completion of the study.

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview recorded. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

I do not want to have this interview recorded:

I am willing to have this interview recorded:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security

Your protection and privacy are paramount so I will utilize pseudonyms so that your identity is protected. In fact, all identifying information will be protected through the use of pseudonyms; this includes your educational background, the name of your institution, and other identifying information. My dissertation committee consists of two faculty members from Saint Peter's University and one faculty member from Brookdale Community College. Information collected will be shared with these individuals.

Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though [I am/we are] taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through e-mail could be read by a third party.

Sharing De-identified Data Collected in this Research

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee the anonymity of your personal data.

Taking part is voluntary

Please understand that your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue at any time, or skip any parts of the

study that make you feel uncomfortable with no penalty to you and no effect on the compensation earned before withdrawing.

Follow up studies

May we contact you again to request your participation in a follow-up study? Yes/No

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Reggie Walker, a doctoral student at Saint Peter's University. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Reggie Walker at rwalker@saintpeters.edu or at 609-851-4572.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature_____ **Date**_____

Your Name (printed)

Signature of person obtaining consent_____ **Date**_____

Printed name of person obtaining consent

This consent form will be kept by me for 5 years beyond the end of the study.

APPENDIX C
PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Name:

Phone Number:

Email:

Hometown:

Age:

Race:

Ethnicity:

Are you a first-generation college student? **Yes** **No**

College/University Attended/Attending:

Highest level of education:

Did you participate in the EOF Summer Program? **Yes** **No**

Did you participate in EOF MLA? **Yes** **No**

I attest that all information provided on this form is true and accurate, recognizing that falsification of information will result in my disqualification from the study.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX D
RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were some of the difficulties you faced during your childhood that required you to be resilient?
2. How did your childhood experiences influence the way you saw yourself in regard to your being resilient?
3. What are some of the issues you believed you'd face as a college student prior to you attending?
4. What were some of the reservations you had, if any, about being a Black male attending a Predominantly White Institution?
5. Upon entering the institution what were some of the challenges you faced?
6. What were the barriers faced in college that were especially challenging for you due to your race and socioeconomic status?
7. How would you describe your institution's ability to assist students from various economic backgrounds?"
8. How did the EOF Program help you in addressing the challenges you've faced in college?
9. In what ways do you consider yourself to be a resilient individual?
10. In what ways did your EOF community influence your resiliency?
11. What made your experience in the EOF Male Leadership Academy unique from other leadership programs that you may have encountered or participated in?

12. How has your experience with EOF and EOFMLA prepared you for the challenges that have come your way post-graduation?