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We Made It. Now What? A Qualitative Case Study Exploring how the Transition of Black Men to a Historically Black Community College is influenced By Orientation 101

Eric R. Agee Jr.
ericagee.1911@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

WE MADE IT. NOW WHAT? A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING HOW THE TRANSITION OF BLACK MEN TO A HISTORICALLY BLACK COMMUNITY COLLEGE IS INFLUENCED BY ORIENTATION 101

Eric R. Agee, Jr., EdD
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Northern Illinois University, 2022
Gudrun Nyunt, Director

A gap in achievement among Black men who pursue postsecondary education remains. Many Black men start their college education at community colleges, but little is known about their experiences at Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs). The purpose of this dissertation of practice was to gain insights into the influence of College 101, also labeled Orientation to College 101 (ORI 101), on the transition of Black men to an HBCC. I utilized a qualitative case study design. The main data source consisted of 15 semistructured interviews, which were supplemented with closed-ended student survey responses on the ORI 101 course evaluation and the course syllabus. Using Schlossberg's transition theory as a framework, this study showed that ORI 101 provided support and fostered the development of strategies needed for success in college. Specifically, ORI 101 increased essential college skills for Black men when delivered synchronously online and in person. ORI 101 helped Black men navigate campus and expanded Black men's support network. ORI 101, however, lacked culturally relevant information on HBCC status, information that could have been beneficial for students as they navigated the transition to the HBCC. This dissertation led to several implications for practice

and future research. A personal reflection on the dissertation process and my learning from this process is also included.

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WE MADE IT. NOW WHAT? A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING HOW THE
TRANSITION OF BLACK MEN TO A HISTORICALLY BLACK COMMUNITY
COLLEGE IS INFLUENCED BY ORIENTATION 101

BY

ERIC R. AGEE, JR.
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Doctoral Director:
Gudrun Nyunt

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PREFACE

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION OF PRACTICE

The dissertation of practice is a scholarly endeavor that explores a complex problem of practice embedded in the work of a professional practitioner (Perry, 2015). The purpose of the dissertation of practice is to prepare students to become scholar-practitioners who use practical research and applied theories to improve their practice while contributing to the knowledge base in the field of higher education and student affairs.

The dissertation of practice consists of three artifacts: (a) The dissertation of practice research proposal (Chapter 1). The purpose of this chapter is to showcase the proposal that guided the research. The purpose of my dissertation was to explore how Black men navigate the transition process to a Historically Black Community College (HBCC). The dissertation used a qualitative case study approach focusing on students enrolled in a student success course (Orientation 101). (b) A manuscript for a scholarly publication (Chapter 2). After conducting my dissertation research, I developed a manuscript that could be published in a scholarly journal in my field. It became apparent that a specific focus on the influence of a student success course (Orientation 101) on the transition of Black men to an HBCC would provide a clearer and stronger case study. Thus, this chapter really hones in on the ways in which the Orientation 101 course shaped Black men's transition to the HBCC. (c) A scholarly reflection (Chapter 3). In the final chapter, I reflect on the dissertation process and discuss applications of the research and newly gained skills to my professional practice and future engagement in research. Specifically, I

highlight my interest in the research topic, obstacles I had to overcome, and applications to practice and research.

CHAPTER 1

DISSERTATION OF PRACTICE PROPOSAL

When it comes to attaining higher education, Black men overwhelmingly select community colleges but are significantly underachieving after entry (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Across the nation, scholars and practitioners are increasingly concerned about outcome disparities between men of color and their peers, particularly Black men. Given the national void of literature on Black men in community college, research and policy efforts have been guided by the four-year literature based on Black men (Wood et al., 2016). While four-year literature on Black men is relevant to the overall improvement of support systems for Black men in higher education, it does not consider the unique circumstances that Black men encounter at two-year colleges.

Taking a closer look at Black men's achievements in community college highlights that Black men also encounter barriers at community colleges. Despite the frequent enrollment of Black men in community colleges, White men earned at least ten times more postsecondary degrees than Black men in 2003 (Harper, 2006a). Only 17.1% of Black men will earn a certificate, degree, or transfer from a community college to a four-year institution within three years (Keflezighi et al., 2016). In contrast, 27% of White men will achieve the same academic goals within the same period (Keflezighi et al., 2016). Outcome rates for students who are

enrolled with a mixture of part-time and full-time intensity indicate that only 15% of Black men will achieve their goals, while 29.7% of White men will do so (Palmer et al., 2014).

According to national data, two-thirds of Black men who start college will never finish (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006a; Palmer et al., 2009). At two-year degree-granting institutions, 30% of first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate degree in Fall 2013 attained it within 150% of the normal time required for completion for these programs (de Brey et al., 2019). The 150% graduation rate was highest for Asian students (36%), followed by Pacific Islander students (34%), White students (32%), Hispanic students (30%), American Indian/Alaska Native students (27%), students of two or more races (25%), and Black students (23%; de Brey et al., 2019). Educational Test Service (ETS) Senior Vice President Michael Nettles explained, “When we look at the data, we find Black men are the farthest behind” (Yaffe, 2015, p. 2). It is clear that Black men are underrepresented in college and those who attend college have lower retention and completion rates.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), including Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs), are often described in the literature as a supportive and nurturing environment for Black students, including Black men (Palmer et al., 2015). HBCUs have maintained this culture because they are institutions that were established prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). These institutions were founded and developed in an environment of legal segregation and, by providing access to higher education, they substantially contributed to the progress Black Americans made in improving their status (Hill, 1984). While many Black students who attend HBCUs may lack cultural capital (e.g., knowledge to help them navigate the

institutional environment), the supportive ethos of these institutions provides students with an abundance of social capital (e.g., social networks in the form of supportive relationships; Brown & Davis, 2001; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). However, recent literature on HBCUs has highlighted the high attrition of Black men. In fact, researchers have reported a gender disparity among Black men and women enrolling and persisting to graduation at HBCUs (Wood & Palmer, 2012; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011; Roach, 2001). Data from the U.S. Department of Education (n.d) indicate that while the enrollment of Black women is increasing at HBCUs, the percentage of Black men enrolled in Black colleges is gradually declining (Palmer et al., 2015). For example, in 1990, Black men and women represented 32.23% and 48.91% of total fall enrollment, respectively. However, by 2017, these percentages shifted to 31.42% and 51.25% (Wood & Palmer, 2012). Black men, thus, seem to encounter barriers not only at predominately White institutions but also HBCUs, and likely also HBCCs.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore how Black men navigate the transition process to a Historically Black Community College (HBCC). If Black men are able to successfully transition to an HBCC, they are more likely to be set up for success at the institution. Thus, better understanding Black men's transition to an HBCC will help provide insights into ways to support Black men's success in college. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Black men experience their transition to a Historically Black Community College?
2. How do Black men at an HBCC perceive their freshmen orientation (ORI 101) impacting their transition to college?

3. How do Black men perceive campus culture impacting their transition to an HBCC?

Review of Literature

Existing literature on the outcomes of Black men at Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs) is scarcely available among the community college literature or buried in general literature on HBCUs. A concern with HBCC research being included in general HBCU literature is that research of four-year institutions is dominant and does not address the uniqueness of two-year HBCUs. The challenge of HBCC literature being included in general community college research is that researchers may not consider the unique contexts of Black men's experiences at HBCCs. Related research – research on Black men at community colleges – may, however, provide us with some insights into the experiences of this population. This study builds on existing literature on Black men in higher education (four-year institutions, HBCUs, and community colleges), which is discussed in this literature review.

Black Men in Higher Education

Many social scientists have noted that Black men account for 4.3% of the total enrollment at four-year postsecondary institutions in the United States (Harper, 2006a; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008, 2010). In 2009, there were approximately one million Black men who enrolled in higher education (Yaffe, 2015). Still, by the standards of the global economy, too few Black men of college age were on track to earn college degrees (Yaffe, 2015). In 2013, only 28% of Black men over age 25 held a postsecondary degree (Yaffe, 2015).

Black men of college age, between 18 and 24, face numerous obstacles as they seek to enroll in, pay for, and complete postsecondary studies (Yaffe, 2015). Black men in great numbers end up placed in noncredit-bearing remedial coursework, which extends their time in college, while the tuition increases accompanying the rollback of public funding for higher education saddle them with debt (Yaffe, 2015). These are just a few barriers that Black men encounter in higher education.

As a result of obstacles at four-year postsecondary institutions, including barriers to acceptance at four-year institutions or inability to cover the cost of a four-year institution, many Black men in higher education are enrolled at community colleges. Black men are one of the key demographic subgroups served by community colleges (Long, 2016). Specifically, 41% of Black men are enrolled in public two-year institutions (commonly referred to as community colleges) (Palmer et al., 2014).

While the largest proportion of Black men in college are enrolled in community colleges, the vast literature on Black men in postsecondary education focuses on their experiences and outcomes in four-year colleges and universities (Wood & Williams, 2013). Although many studies have been published on Black men in education, only a handful focus on the community college context (Wood & Hilton, 2012). In fact, Wood and Hilton (2012) found that less than eight peer-reviewed studies were published on Black men in community college from 1971-2009. National data on community colleges show that Black men completion rate is 41.1%, the lowest among men; completion rates for other men are as follows: Asian Americans, 69.6%; Latinos, 50.3%; and Whites, 54.8% (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). These rates, among

other measures of success, confirm the ubiquitous discourse among researchers and practitioners on the disparate success of young Black men in community college (Harper & Wood, 2016).

HBCUs, or in particular HBCCs, may be institutions that provide a more supportive climate for Black men. However, little is known about Black men's experiences in HBCCs. All too often, discussion of HBCUs focuses on four-year institutions and precludes consideration of their two-year counterparts (Elliot et al., 2019). One of the best things about HBCUs is their diversity; there is no one-size-fits-all package and of the 100+ colleges, none are alike (*HBCU Listing*, 2018). Theology schools and professional schools (law, pharmacy and medical) exist along with traditional four-year colleges, though some are liberal arts colleges and others are large universities (*HBCU Listing*, 2018). Additionally, there are two-year HBCUs, those that offer associate degrees and certificate programs (*HBCU Listing*, 2018). Two-year HBCUs are located in Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and DC (*HBCU Listing*, 2018).

The history of HBCCs, like all HBCUs, began against the backdrop of Black sufferings and strivings in the American experience (Lovett, 2011). Avery college, the first two-year HBCU, was founded in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1849 (Elliot et al., 2019). Avery college, along with 18 other HBCCs, were early two-year colleges and their mission, much like four-year HBCUs, focused primarily on educating Black Americans (Elliot et al., 2019). In 2018, there were 101 HBCUs in 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Of the 101 HBCUs, 51 were public institutions, 50 were private nonprofit institutions, and 15 were two-year institutions (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 2019b). While Black enrollment at HBCUs increased by 17% between 1976 and 2018, the total number of Black students enrolled in all degree-

granting postsecondary institutions more than doubled during this period (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 2019a). As a result, among Black students, the percentage enrolled at HBCUs fell from 18% in 1976 to 9% in 2010, then showed no measurable change between 2010 and 2018 (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 2019c).

As a smaller percentage of Black students chooses to enroll in HBCUs, research needs to get a better understanding of the ways in which HBCUs, in general, and HBCCs, in particular, can foster persistence and completion of Black men. Gaining insights into the ways HBCCs are or are not fostering Black men's college success can provide important insights into ways to narrow the achievement gap for the Black men enrolled at HBCCs as well as ways to adapt some of their promising practices to a four-year or predominately White institutional context.

This study builds on what is known about Black men's experience in college, whether at four-year institutions, community colleges, or HBCUs. Next, I discuss literature related to precollege considerations, financial support, spirituality and family support, academic involvement, and institutional culture and student engagement to provide a baseline for what we know about Black men's transition to and experiences in college.

Precollege Considerations

Precollege considerations are factors and experiences occurring prior to Black men matriculating to community college that enhance or hinder their success (Harris & Wood, 2013). These precollege considerations include the student's goals (academic, career, education, personal), and background (age, high school grade point average, academic preparation) and societal norms that shape perceptions of Black men (Harris & Wood, 2013). For example, societal messages about Black men's academic abilities or racist stereotypes that depict them as

lazy or uninterested in education can influence both students' and educators' views about the likelihood that these students will be successful in community college (Bush et al., 2009). In addition, there is some indication that a parent's level of education has a role in student success, with increased levels of education having a positive effect on persistence (Hagedorn et al., 2001). Also, a level of certainty of students' goals, higher high school grade point averages, and a greater commitment to a major predicted persistence among Black men at urban community colleges (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Mason, 1998).

A core consideration for Black men in college is generation status. Research has shown that first-generation students are significantly less likely to succeed than those whose parents have earned a college degree (Freeman & Huggans, 2009). First-generation students typically have more limited cultural and social capital needed for success in academia in comparison to their non-first-generation peers (Strayhorn, 2006). However, social capital and other human assets tend to heavily support an inner-city, first-generation student's decision to attend college (Chen & Zerquera, 2017). Despite this, the overall success and graduation rates for first-in-family, low-income, Black students are much lower than other groups (Aidman & Malerba, 2017). The kinds of skills and social capital that Black men come into the education system with are typically not valued or recognized by the traditional norms of higher education (Person et al., 2017). Community colleges and other sectors of higher education serve men of color from a deficit model perspective (Harper, 2008). Black students who attend HBCUs may lack cultural capital (e.g., knowledge to help them navigate the institutional environment) because of their status as first-generation college students; however, the supportive ethos of these institutions provides them with an abundance of social capital (e.g., social networks in the form of

supportive relationship), which is invaluable to their persistence and retention (Brown & Davis, 2001; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Overall, two-thirds of Black college men are first-generation college goers (67.7%; Palmer et al., 2014). Beyond the relatively little attention that has been paid by scholars to men of color in community colleges, trends in persistence, attainment, and transfer reveal significant disparities among these students, especially when compared with men from more advantaged backgrounds (Harris & Wood, 2013).

Financial Support, Spirituality, and Family Support

Many researchers have found that financial support factors are among the most important predictors of decisions to leave college for minority students (Heller, 2003; Perna, 2006; St. John, 2002; St. John et al., 2001; St. John et al., 1996; St. John & Starkey, 1995; Swail et al., 2003; Titus, 2006; Wood et al., 2011). For example, many minority students generally enroll in community colleges (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011) and public HBCUs because they are seen as a low-cost option (Palmer et al., 2009). For Black men, the inability to pay for college, insufficient financial resources, or the need to financially support their family has a substantial impact on their likelihood of success (Palmer et al., 2014). Due to inadequate finances, many minority students in general need to have a job to compensate for their school and living expenses (Branch-Brioso, 2009; Green & Glasson, 2009).

While finances often hinder Black men's success in college, spirituality has been found to foster their success. Spirituality is defined in various ways by researchers. Mattis (2000) indicated that spirituality includes a belief in having a personal relationship with God and living according to God's will. On the other hand, Love and Talbot (1999) noted that spirituality involves the pursuit of discovering meaning and purpose in one's life. Extant literature has

suggested a relationship between spirituality and retention for Black men in college (Dancy, 2010; Herndon, 2003; Watson, 2006). For example, Herndon (2003) conducted a study with 13 Black men enrolled in college and found that spirituality was critical to the success of the participants. Specifically, he noted that spirituality bolstered their resiliency, provided a sense of purpose, and augmented the support that participants received from religious institutions. While Wood and Hilton (2012) have reported similar findings for Black men in community colleges, using Armstrong's Measure of Spirituality with 125 Black students, Weddle-West et al. (2013) found that Black men at HBCUs scored significantly lower on the spiritual belief variable than Black men and women at predominately White institutions (PWIs). Given the challenges that Black students face at PWIs, Weddle-West et al. (2013) concluded that Black students at these institutions may need to rely more on spirituality as a coping mechanism than students at HBCUs.

In addition to spirituality, research has identified family as important to the success of Black men in higher education (Palmer et al., 2014). Notably, in Tinto's theory of student departure, he urged students transitioning from high school to college to divorce themselves from their past communities, including friends and family, to become academically and socially integrated into the college milieu (Tinto, 1993). Despite this, researchers have noted that for minority students, family plays an important role in their presence. Palmer et al. (2014) indicated that although some Black men's family members lacked formal education, they provided inspirational and encouraging messages that had a significant impact on their success.

Academic Involvement

Academic factors encompass variables that are directly related to students' academic outcomes in community colleges (Harris & Wood, 2013). Examples of these variables include attending class regularly (Mason, 1998), academic integration (Flowers, 2006), attending school full time (Freeman & Huggans, 2009; Hagedorn et al., 2001), and using academic services (Glenn, 2003; Mason, 1998). The studies in the academic domain conclude that Black men at two- year institutions tend to be less academically integrated than their peers who attend four-year institutions (Harris & Wood, 2013). This is particularly true when experiences such as participating in study groups, interacting with faculty members outside of class, and meeting with academic advisors are considered (Harris & Wood, 2013). Bush and Bush (2010) and Wood and Turner (2010) noted that Black men typically don't seek informal interactions with faculty members because they perceive faculty as unfriendly, uncaring, and not supportive. Pope's (2006) study involving 74 Black men who attended 15 community colleges was an exception. One of the key findings from Pope's study was that Black men perceived faculty as generally supportive and believed they respected and appreciated campus diversity (Pope, 2006, as cited in Harris & Wood, 2013).

Wood's (2012b) study sought to better understand the relationship between academic outcomes and six-year persistence and attainment rates among Black men in community colleges. Wood found that students had significantly greater odds of persistence or attainment if they received an incomplete in a course, repeated a course for a higher grade, or met with a faculty member (Harris & Wood, 2013). Wood posited that the curious finding of receiving an incomplete in a course and persistence required students to engage with faculty and be proactive

enough to make the request for the incomplete grade or to make up the missing work (Harris & Wood, 2013). Generally, researchers concluded that student success outcomes for Black men in community college are shaped heavily by the extent to which they become immersed in the academic experience. Researchers also noted that institutions bear some responsibility for fostering campus environments that will encourage Black men to pursue the type of academic experiences that often lead to student success (Palmer et al., 2014).

Institutional Culture

A positive campus climate has been found to be associated with better outcomes for Black men (Beckles, 2008; Roberts, 2009). Several scholars have noted that persistence should not focus solely on the student and their engagement with the institution, but also on the institution's role in facilitating student engagement (Wood & Williams, 2013). These scholars have focused on how academic, social, and environmental issues are a byproduct of the institution and lead to dismal outcomes for students. For example, Bush and Bush (2010) noted that many college personnel are unwilling to engage in introspection on how their efforts, policies, practices, and personnel systematically produce educational disparities. In this light, they suggested that institutions foster faculty-student interaction and positive campus climates that enable students to continue in college. Similarly, Glenn (2003) identified several institutional practices that can lead to positive student persistence, including identifying students who may be at risk of attrition before enrollment and monitoring their progress over time, mentoring students in need of guidance, requiring students to visit an advisor, and mandating campus orientations.

Much literature discussed the importance of institutional responsibility and accountability for the success of men of color by being proactive in designing and implementing effective programs, services, policies, and practices that meet students' needs and leverage students' assets (Bush et al., 2009; Freeman & Huggans, 2009; Harper, 2009; Ray et al., 2009). Glenn (2003) underscored the value of support services. In doing so, Glenn (2003) found that Texas community colleges that had the highest graduation rate for Black men had academic advising services that were designated for freshmen students, offered orientation courses that could be taken for academic credit, monitored attendance and required tutoring for students identified as at risk, and afforded students access to well-advertised counseling services.

Faculty support plays a significant role in the success of men of color in community colleges (Bush & Bush, 2010; Flowers, 2006; Pope, 2006; Sutherland, 2011; Wood, 2012a; Wood & Turner, 2010). For instance, Wood and Turner's (2010) qualitative study of the experiences of 28 Black men enrolled at an urban community college in the Southwest region of the United States identified four key elements that facilitated student-faculty engagement: (1) exhibiting a friendly demeanor, (2) checking in on students' progress, (3) listening to students' concerns, and (4) encouraging student success by challenging them to meet high expectations. To help faculty develop a sense of student centeredness, institutions should hold workshops and consider studying institutions, such as HBCUs, that have a reputation of hiring faculty who go above and beyond the call of duty to help maximize student success (Palmer et al., 2014).

Student Engagement, Sense of Belonging, and Mattering

Student engagement is defined as time and effort students devote to activities linked to the desired outcomes (Kuh, 2009). It generally consists of students participating in meaningful

activities and experiences, such as faculty-student collaboration, in-class discussions, peer interactions, and deep active learning (Strayhorn & Devita, 2010). One of the primary benefits of campus engagement is an increased sense of belonging on campus (Palmer et al., 2014). Sense of belonging is conceptualized as psychological processes connected with the students' adjustment and transition into college. Schlossberg's (1989) work on mattering provides a lucid definition of belonging. Specifically, Schlossberg underscores the importance of students feeling like their presence on campus is noticed and valued by others, such as faculty, staff, and peers (Johnson et al., 2007).

Belonging and mattering have a significant impact on Black men's experiences in college. In community colleges, Flowers (2006) found that Black men were less integrated academically and socially than their same-race counterparts in four-year institutions, indicating a need to increase campus engagement for Black men community college students. Hagedorn et al. (2001) observed that Black men who feel capable of college-level work tend to complete the second semester of their freshman year in greater proportions than those who feel less capable; they are also more likely to persist to degree completion. Social support, defined as "perceived instrumental or expressive profusions supplied to the individual by confiding partners, social networks, and the greater community," is also correlated to persistence and completion for Black men (Lin, Dean, & Ensel, 1986, cited in Jay & D'Augelli, 1991, p. 95).

Peer interaction influences campus engagement among students (Astin, 1993; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2006b; Tinto, 1993). By interacting with peers, students have greater exposure to campus resources and student organizations and develop a social network that can be critical in helping them navigate academic and nonacademic dilemmas (Astin, 1993; Bonner &

Bailey, 2006; Tinto, 1993). For Black students in higher education, peer groups play an even greater role because they help facilitate a sense of belonging in an institutional milieu that differs significantly from “their ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic background” (Bonner & Bailey, 2006, p. 26). According to Astin (1993), peer interaction facilitates academic development, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and cultural awareness for Black men in particular. Other scholars (Davis, 1999; Harper, 2006b, 2013; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008) support the relationship between peer interaction and a wide range of academic and social gains for Black men. In a study of 32 high-achieving Black men, Harper (2006b) reported that participants’ same-race peers helped to support, encourage, and validate their academic success. Similarly, Palmer and Gasman (2008) found that relationships with like-minded peers who were focused on succeeding academically had a positive impact on the success of 11 Black men at an HBCU.

Institution Types and Initiatives Intended to Support Black Students

Despite the fact that fewer Black students are attending HBCUs (Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Sissoko & Shiau, 2005), due largely to the promulgation of governmental initiatives and litigation designed to integrate the education of Blacks and Whites, these institutions continue to play a prominent role in serving as a linchpin for Black students to access higher education (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). HBCUs are known for providing a supportive and family-like environment that helps to facilitate students’ self-efficacy, racial pride, psychological wellness, academic development, and persistence (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Black students at HBCUs reportedly have stronger academic self-concepts, are more satisfied with their college

experience, and are engaged at higher levels than their same-race counterparts at PWIs (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper & Gasman, 2008). Research from other scholars has supported the impact that HBCUs have on retention and persistence of Black students (Gasman, 2008; Gasman et al., 2010; Ross, 1998). Kim and Conrad (2006) pointed out that one of the factors that make HBCUs unique is their ability to achieve these outcomes while lacking funding parity with their PWI counterparts. While research overwhelmingly supports the impact that HBCUs have on Black students, some research has noted that a number of HBCUs have high attrition rates because they enroll a higher number of first-generation, low-income, Pell-eligible students (Gasman, 2013). Furthermore, other threads of research on HBCUs have commented on the gender imbalances on many of these campuses (Gasman, 2013). Not only are more women enrolling in HBCUs, they are also more likely than men to graduate from these institutions (Palmer et al., 2014). Given the low enrollment and success of Black men at HBCUs, Kimbrough and Harper (2006) asserted more research is needed on the experience of Black men at these institutions.

There has been little study of HBCCs' administration, governance, and policy context (Elliot et al., 2019). Though the institutions have historically extended educational opportunity like their four-year and predominately White counterparts, limited research has been found on how HBCCs support the social mobility of their students, specifically Black men (Elliot et al., 2019). These ongoing knowledge gaps provide scholarly opportunities for researchers and analysts, who can generate evidence-based recommendations to practitioners and policymakers (Elliot et al., 2019). Elucidating HBCCs can better integrate the institutions into existing research and advocacy platforms, and to study them may also lead to practical implications, such as

building capacity and fostering collaboration with other HBCUs, minority-serving institutions (MSIs), and community colleges (Elliot et al., 2019).

Black male initiatives (BMIs) and minority male initiatives (MMIs) have also been shown to facilitate campus engagement among Black men (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper & Harris, 2012; Palmer et al., 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2012). Many BMIs are research based in that program development and implementation are informed by extant research and theory (Palmer et al., 2014). To this end, they function to foster academic and social integration, student engagement, sense of belonging, and a welcoming and affirming campus environment for Black men (Palmer et al., 2014). These initiatives have a focus on collectivity, as exemplified through program slogans, mottos, and themes (Palmer et al., 2014). Collectivity suggests that successes and failures are mutually shared (Palmer et al., 2014). Under this, value, collaboration, community, and equity are important virtues. Many BMIs have programming designed to facilitate students' critical reflection of their personal, academic, and professional goals and philosophical outlook on life (Palmer et al., 2014).

Though diverse in nature, BMIs provide a safe place for Black men to discuss a range of issues, from academic to social experiences (Palmer et al., 2014). Similarly, MMI vary greatly and employ diverse interventions (Keflezighi et al., 2016). However, the five most common services employed by MMIs were professional skills development, mentoring, college success and survival skills, service learning, and tutoring (Keflezighi et al., 2016). By far, the two most common interventions focused on professional skills development and mentoring. These programs have also been critical in helping increase retention and persistence at HBCUs (Palmer et al., 2013). Furthermore, research has shown that BMIs help normalize the importance of Black

men relying not only on each other for support but also the larger campus system (Palmer et al., 2009; Palmer et al., 2013). While evidence indicates that community colleges have retention programs and BMIs to help facilitate the success of Black men (Wood, 2011; Wood & Harris, 2013), there is little research to assess the efficacy of these programs (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). More research is needed on the ways different initiatives foster Black men's success at HBCCs.

Theoretical Framework

This case study will use transition theory, originally developed by Nancy K. Schlossberg. The transition theory provides a systematic framework for counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other helpers as they listen to the many stories of navigating a transition — each one unique — of colleagues, friends, and clients (Anderson et al., 2012). The transitions differ and the individuals differ, but the structure for understanding individuals in transition is stable (Anderson et al., 2012). The transition model has three major parts: (a) Approaching Transitions (transition identification and transition process), (b) Taking Stock of coping resources (the 4 S system) and (c) Taking Charge (strengthening resources). I will discuss each of these parts next.

Approaching Transitions identifies the nature of the transition and provides an understanding of which perspective is the best for dealing with the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Transition identification explores change that is impending—a new baby, a job change, an interpersonal change, a relationship change—and whether it is anticipated, unanticipated, or a nonevent (Anderson et al., 2012). Knowing more about the transition and being able to describe provides insights into what is troubling or challenging an individual (Anderson et al., 2012).

Even more important than mere identification of the change is understanding the degree to which the transition changes the individual's life (Anderson et al., 2012). Three people describing a similar transition, for example job loss, are not talking about the same event. To understand its significance, one needs to identify how the job's loss has changed each individual's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Anderson et al., 2012).

The transition process locates where the adult is in the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). The individual may have just learned about an impending job loss; it may be the first week or year after a job loss. Reactions to any transition change over time, depending on whether one is moving in, through, or out of the transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

Taking Stock of coping resources using the 4 S system provides a way to identify the potential resources someone possesses to cope with the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). These four major sets of factors influence the ability of the individual to cope during a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). No matter where one is in the transition process, no matter what the transition is, one deals with it differently depending on these resources (Anderson et al., 2012).

1. The *Situation* variable looks at what is happening. For example, the transition to college is different from the transition to college while taking care of dependents. Research has shown that Black men in two-year colleges have many variables that impact the situation. In this case study, I will explore the situations of Black men at an HBCC to better understand how to empower Black men to successfully navigate through an HBCC while considering their individual, unique situation (Anderson et al., 2012).

Situation varies according to the following factors: trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment

(Anderson et al., 2012). Trigger is what set off the transition and put the transition into motion (Anderson et al., 2012). Timing is how the transition relates to one's social clock (Anderson et al., 2012). Control refers to the aspects of the transition that individuals can control (Anderson et al., 2012). Role change can occur during an individual's transition if they feel there is a need to make this change (Anderson et al., 2012). Duration involves temporary or permanent change stemming from the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). If a previous experience with a similar transition exists, this will impact the individual's response to a new transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Concurrent stresses, if any, are those additional stressors that are happening with the individual that can impact the transition. Assessment determines whether the individual views the situation positively or negatively (Anderson et al., 2012).

2. The *Self* variable involves those who are experiencing the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Everyone is different in terms of life issues and personality. Black men at HBCCs should be able to participate in programs that help them feel good about self or improve how they see themselves on campus. It is complex to get a handle on the self, but Anderson et al. (2012) identified the following characteristics that are particularly relevant for individuals as they cope with change: socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, psychological resources, ego development, outlook-optimism and self-efficacy, commitment and values, and spirituality and resilience (Anderson et al., 2012).

3. The *Support* variable pertains to what help is available. Support and available options vary for each individual (Anderson et al., 2012). Support systems or groups can help Black men as they transition to HBCCs. Support systems facilitated on campus can fill in any gaps that Black men have regarding academic, social, cultural, spiritual, financial and other types of

support needed. Support systems can come in many forms: affirmation, aid, social relationships, organizations, and institutions (Anderson et al., 2012). HBCCs can serve as a continuum of Black men's "convoy of social support" and should be considered a high resource for transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

4. The *Strategies* variable involves a person's ability to cope. People navigate transitions in different ways (Anderson et al., 2012). Researchers are still looking for strategies that best serve Black men at community colleges (Anderson et al., 2012). As attrition remains a complex problem at community colleges and Black men continue to underperform, the need for success strategies remains constant. Once determined, a significant impact can be made by institutions that acknowledge the responsibility to foster strategies for Black men at HBCCs.

Taking Charge by strengthening resources demonstrates the use of new strategies (Anderson et al., 2012). Even though some transitions are out of an individual's control, one can control the way they manage them — they can strengthen their resources, i.e., the 4 S's. For Black men, the transition to an HBCC should not be a helter-skelter experience but rather a manageable and productive experience that creates the foundation for success, and institutions need to provide the resources necessary to empower Black men to take charge of their transitions.

Schlossberg's transition theory has been applied in previous research focused on underserved and underprivileged communities transitioning to college. For example, Schooler (2014) found that Schlossberg and colleagues' (1995) transition theory is widely applicable to study Native American student transition into college life. Many of the factors highlighted in Schlossberg's transition theory are useful and important when guiding Native American students in their first year of college (Schooler, 2014). The level of financial, family, and institutional

support influences a student's decision to persist to graduation or leave college (Schooler, 2014). Furthermore, the characteristics a student brings with him or her to the institution, such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture, and spirituality, have a large impact on a student's experience during college (Schooler, 2014). While Schooler (2014) found Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition theory to be useful in studying the transition experiences of Native Americans, Schooler (2014) also noted that the theory does not capture the critical issues of Native American students' transitions into college life. Thus, Schooler (2014) combined Schlossberg's theory with other transition models to form the Native American college student transition theory.

Because literature on Black men transitioning to an HBCC is sparse, there is no unique transition theory for this population and the unique college setting. Thus, this study will be guided by Schlossberg's theory. However, I will be open to data that may not fit the theory and will, throughout the data analysis process, question whether this theory fits this population and college setting.

Research Design

To provide insight into the transition process of Black men to a HBCC, I will conduct a descriptive qualitative case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case studies require intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bound by space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The phenomenon of this case study is the transition process of Black men into community college. I will study this phenomenon at one specific

HBCC, thus the case will be bound within one institution. The main data source will be interviews with participants. Interviews will yield meaningful and rich responses about participants' personalized experience. However, as is common in case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I will utilize multiple methods to get an in-depth understanding of the case from different perspectives. I will thus also analyze institutional records pertaining to new student orientation performance and student course evaluations of ORI 101, Freshman Academy.

Epistemological Approach

The epistemological approach to explore the perceptions of Black men's transition to an HBCC is rooted in the constructivist worldview. Constructivism is a term often used interchangeably with interpretivism (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Social constructivists assume that reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, constructivists believe there are multiple realities or interpretations of a single event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretations flowing from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The researcher's intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for complexity of views of the situation being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of the situation, typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The constructivist worldview aligns with this case study because I want to accomplish the following: understand what Black men experience in their transition to an

HBCC, understand how Black men's transition is shaped by interactions with individuals and the institution, and interpret how Black men make meaning about their transition process to an HBCC.

Research Site

Toussaint State Community College (TSCC, a pseudonym) is a Historically Black Community College servicing 3,274 students. Minority enrollment is 81% of the student body (majority Black), which is more than the state average of 39%. At TSCC, the graduation rate is 19% within 150% normal time, the retention rate is 51%, and the transfer-out rate is 24% as of August 31, 2020. Toussaint State Community College is one of fifteen Historically Black Community Colleges in the United States. Graduation rates of American Indian or Alaska Native students is 0.00%, Asian students is 100.00%, Black (non-Hispanic) students is 17.10%, Hispanic students is 40.00%, White students is 27.03%, and students of two or more races is 20.00% at TSCC. Black men have the lowest graduation rate at 12.61%. Hispanic men graduate at a rate of 50% and White men at 33.33%. Black men make up 28% of the student population. These statistics highlight that TSCC has a higher than average enrollment of Black students, but the graduation rates are low. Not only are the graduation rates low in general, but when compared to other student groups, Black men graduate the least. This data indicates that there is a problem with Black men's academic success that requires research to better understand what may be the reasons for this gap in achievement.

In 2010, Toussaint State Community College's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was designed to help students learn to better navigate the scope and depth of what a full college experience has to offer; improve student engagement levels; broaden individual skills, abilities,

and horizons; strengthen intellectual and individual responsibility and independence; and actively involve students in the learning process. Part of this plan was to revamp the Freshman Academy (ORI 101) and the Faculty & Staff Academy.

The Freshman Academy is a mandatory course designed to equip, engage, and empower students and provides students with an array of experimental learning opportunities geared toward specific student learning outcomes. Each expected outcome addresses a specific and targeted area that the college (faculty, staff, students, and administrators), the community and other stakeholders, as well as strategic planning data indicated as areas in need of improvement. The targeted areas include technology skills, critical thinking skills, communication skills (oral, written and listening), social skills, time management skills, study skills, leadership skills and accepting personal responsibility.

One hundred percent of the curriculum is delivered through Blackboard (the learning management system offered at Toussaint State Community College). Each week (within Blackboard) the curriculum modules are broken down, along with all materials for each unit. Students can view and interact with the course materials and take their quizzes online. Grading of the majority of the assignments is automatic, so students enrolled in ORI 101 have the benefit of receiving immediate feedback on formative assessments throughout the course. The course also has a multitude of “How to” videos threaded throughout the course and are explicitly designed to equip, engage, and empower students to understand and work through the key processes at the college (i.e., how to register online, how to interpret a degree plan, how to complete a withdrawal request, etc.). ORI 101 is delivered in three ways: face-to-face,

synchronous, and fully online. These modes of delivery are offered in 8-week sessions in the Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters.

The Faculty & Staff Academy is housed in the Center for Teaching Excellence and Learning (CTEL) and designed to equip, engage and empower faculty and staff with enhanced engagement skills. Faculty and staff are exposed to a variety of seminars, workshops, and activities that are focused on the teaching and learning process and how to engage students in that process. Participants gain the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in fostering student learning and enabling the college to meet goals college-wide. Eighteen instructors (Freshman Academy master educators) were selected by the chairperson of orientation to teach within the Freshman Academy and successfully completed the Faculty Academy training experience, which was comprised of nine modules developed by the QEP Professional Development Team. The first eight modules are designed to provide faculty with a variety of experiences that will enable them to become more versed on student engagement, classroom technologies, learning styles, motivation techniques, team building, and so forth. The last component is a series of activities that work to teach faculty the actual Freshman Academy course itself. Faculty are exposed to each lesson, project, and activity covered in the Freshman Academy and trained on the My Skills Lab component of the course.

Participants

I will employ purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to recruit Black men classified as first-time, first-year students between the ages of 18 and 25 who have taken Freshmen Academy (ORI 101). Sampling in qualitative inquiry is characterized as purposeful; that is, sampling for information-rich cases holds the greatest potential for generating insight about the phenomenon

of interest (Jones et al., 2014). Black men enrolled as full-time or part-time students will be eligible for this study. This study is open to both statuses, full-time and part-time, because I believe research should consider the various factors that may contribute to Black men's enrollment status as well as how the enrollment status influences Black men's transition to an HBCC.

I will recruit a minimum of 20 Black men with a prerecorded video invitation through the institution's email platform, Mongoose, a texting platform used by enrollment specialists, and face-to-face, virtual, Zoom, or Blackboard Collaborate invitations in ORI 101. The verbal invitations will be a more personal form of recruiting as many of the Black men will have already received the email. I anticipate that having approximately 20 participants will help me reach data saturation (Jones et al., 2014). When I begin hearing and reading redundancy from the participants, I will know that I have achieved data saturation.

I will establish confidentiality by using an informed consent form. With campuses reopening in the summer, I'll conduct face-to-face interviews and have the students complete the consent form at the beginning of the interview. I will also verbally restate the importance of confidentiality at the time of the interviews, review the consent form again, and inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from participation at any time of the study.

Data Collection

I will conduct individual face-to-face interviews to gain insight on the transition process of the Black men at TSCC. Interviews are a common form of data collection in qualitative case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and I expect to gain significant amounts of information on Black men's perspectives on transitioning to an HBCC. Although time

consuming, individual interviews are necessary to yield significant amounts of rich information (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The questions for the interviews are designed to gain insight into the transition of Black men into TSCC. The questions are broken down into five sections guided by Schlossberg's theory (See Appendix C). The interviews will be 45-minute face-to-face audio-recorded interviews. The recording will be used for transcription with subsequent analysis.

However, before recording, I will obtain permission from the participants by informed consent. I will conduct semistructured interviews. This consists of predetermined but flexibly worded questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). I will also use follow up questions if needed to probe more deeply into the transition of the participants.

In addition to interviews, I will collect institutional documents submitted by participants to gain a more in-depth understanding of the case. These documents will include the ORI 101 course syllabus and student surveys. The course syllabus will provide a guideline for content sections, assignments, and learning outcomes contributing to the Black men in the course. Student surveys are administered to students toward the completion of each course at TSCC. Student surveys will provide additional insights into the experiences of Black men in the Freshman Academy, an important support system during their transition to the institution.

Data Analysis

Following the one-on-one interviews, I will organize the data by transcribing the student responses, typing notes, and sorting data for reading. Reading the data will provide a sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Once the data is organized, I will use Tesch's eight steps in the coding process (as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to code the data. First, I will read all the transcriptions carefully

and jot down ideas as I read to get a sense of all the interview data. Second, I will go through one interview transcript, asking myself, “What is this data about?” as I review the transcript. It’s my intention to focus on the underlying meaning and write thoughts down as I review the transcript. After reviewing several transcripts as described in step two, I will make a list of all topics as my third step in data analysis. I will cluster together similar topics and form topics into columns, perhaps arrayed as major, unique, and leftover topics. Fourth, I will take the list I created and go back to the data. I will abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Trying this preliminary organizing scheme will uncover any new categories or codes. Fifth, I will find the most descriptive wording for data topics and turn them into categories. I will look for ways of reducing my total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Drawing lines between categories can show interrelationships. Sixth, I will make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes. Seventh, I will assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis. If necessary, as an eighth step, I will recode existing data.

By using this technique, I will be able to get a sense of the entire theme of the transition of Black men to an HBCC. This will also allow me to ask important questions about the data, cluster information together, organize codes, use descriptive words for organization, assemble data according to categories, and recode the existing data if necessary (as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

After analyzing the interview data, I will take a look at all the institutional documents I have collected. Using the coding scheme and categories developed through my interview analysis, I will code institutional data to get a sense of whether these documents support my

findings or provide new insights. I will go back and forth between the interview findings and the institutional documents, revising emerging themes as needed to include both data from the interviews and the institutional documents.

Trustworthiness

Multiple approaches will be used to establish trustworthiness of the research findings. Triangulation will be used to examine evidence from different sources and build coherent justification of themes pertaining to this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I will triangulate the data by examining evidence from interviews, student surveys, and the ORI 101 syllabus. I will use rich, thick description to convey findings. This description may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The goal is to provide detailed descriptions of the interviews and documents. These details can offer an in-depth glimpse into the perspectives of Black men at an HBCC and present the data to be more realistic and richer (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Member checking will be used in the form of a focus group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once I have developed emerging themes, I will reach out to participants and set up a focus group. During this focus group, I will share the emerging themes with students and ask them to share initial reactions, thoughts, and any other feedback they may have about the themes. Based on participants' input, I will review themes as needed. This will allow me to make sure that I am accurately presenting participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The use of peer debriefing will further enhance trustworthiness by allowing peer debriefers to review and ask questions about the qualitative study so that the account can resonate with people outside of the research (Creswell & Creswell,

2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For my peer debriefing, I will choose one member from my cohort, one colleague, and my dissertation committee. The final approach aimed at strengthening the trustworthiness of my research will be including my positionality statement in any publications or reports of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Researcher Positionality

I approach this study as a millennial Black man with eleven years of experience as a professor at TSCC, but I realize that my precollege experience helped mold me for my current position as a department chair. I was born in Birmingham, AL, and I grew up 7 miles from TSCC in an urban neighborhood. My mother was a kindergarten teacher and a graduate of the University of Alabama at Birmingham. My father was an electrician, who had earned his two-year certificate from Blakemore State Technical College (a pseudonym), which later became TSCC's second campus. Academic excellence and the importance of working hard were two lessons that meshed from childhood to now and has resulted in my journey as a researcher. The first house I lived in is on my route to work to TSCC, which serves as a reminder of my social connection to the community where TSCC is located. Also, as a member of an underserved and underprivileged subgroup, I have also experienced how socioeconomic factors can impact the educational trajectory of Black men.

My educational path has been filled with many doubts and uncertainties at each institutional level of higher education that I have experienced. In 2002, I was conditionally accepted to the University of Alabama at Birmingham because of my ACT score. In 2007, I became a transient student at Toussaint State Community College for two semesters to help remedy some of the academic struggles I had at UAB. As an HBCU, TSCC gave me the

experience I needed in a more intimate educational environment where most of the students were my peers of similar backgrounds and the same-race. In 2011, I was conditionally accepted into a master's program at the University of Alabama because of my final undergraduate GPA and MAT score. To advance my career as an educator, I was conditionally accepted into a second master's program in 2017 at Auburn University-Montgomery, from which I was removed for failure to reach a certain score on the Math portion of the PRAXIS exam. For professional development reasons, I re-entered the same program as a nondegree-seeking student and paid out-of-pocket for tuition and fees, subsequently completing the requirements to advance my career. In 2018, I was accepted without condition to Northern Illinois University to pursue a Doctorate degree. Each of these institutions is a PWI (predominately White institution), but the following factors helped me to persist: the Black Student Awareness Committee (BSAC) at UAB, Black Greek life, spirituality, and Black faculty mentoring. As I reviewed literature on Black men and their transition into community colleges, I realized my own connection to the literature because of my past and present experiences as a Black man in higher education. Existing literature on Black men enrolled at HBCCs has further shed light on the fact that my academic struggles were not an anomaly, but like my own personal experience, this is a trend that requires more research.

As a millennial Black man, I believe that I will have an advantage when it comes to establishing rapport and building a relationship with the participants of this research. Personally, I have always felt that I am old enough to be a mentor to the students, but young enough to relate to similar challenges that students currently experience. Also, being seen as one of the youngest faculty members at TSCC and a department chair, tends to draw students to inquire about my

academic journey. However, as I approach my twelfth year as a faculty member at TSCC, the age gap is widening and I have to be more intentional about truly understanding what students are experiencing and what the best approach is to teaching and building relationships.

Nevertheless, I am confident that I can establish enough of a relationship to gain valuable insight into experiences of Black men on campus.

Significance

Community colleges serve as the primary pathway into postsecondary education for Black men (Bush & Bush, 2010). Community college will continue to play a critical role in providing opportunities for Black men to access postsecondary education, and many of the Black men in four-year colleges started off at community colleges (Palmer et al., 2014). Only 17.1% of Black men will earn a certificate, degree, or transfer from a community college to a four-year institution within three years (Keflezighi et al., 2016). In community colleges, Flowers (2006) found that Black men were less integrated academically and socially than their same-race counterparts in four-year institutions, indicating a need to increase campus engagement for Black men community college students. Research focused on the experiences of Black men at community colleges indicates that Black men struggle to build connections with faculty (Palmer et al., 2014). For example, Bush and Bush (2010) noted that many college personnel are unwilling to engage in introspection on how their efforts, policies, practices, and personnel systematically produce educational disparities. When compared to other racial/ethnic groups, Black men have the lowest graduation rates at community colleges (Palmer et al., 2014).

Researchers have devoted considerable time and attention to examining the experiences of Black men at four-year PWIs but have failed to devote equal attention to the experiences of Black men in other contexts (Palmer et al., 2014). For example, Wood and Hilton (2012) found that less than eight peer-reviewed studies were published on Black men attending community college from 1971 to 2009. Even fewer studies have focused on Black men's experiences in HBCCs. This research will add to the emerging research on Black men in community college in the last few years and expand on this research by focusing on the unique context of an HBCC. This research will contribute to the knowledge needed to help faculty, administrators, student affairs professionals, and policymakers regarding the experience of Black men in community college, in general, and HBCCs, in particular. Enhanced understanding of experiences of Black men at an HBCC can lead to improved policies, programs, and practices that can enhance retention among Black men in all community colleges.

Similarly, additional research is needed on Black men at HBCUs, which includes HBCCs (Palmer et al., 2014). While literature on HBCUs is replete with empirical evidence of the relevancy of HBCUs to the landscape of American higher education, little research has focused on the experience's Black men within these institutional contexts (Palmer et al., 2014). Because this research is focused on the HBCCs, it will point toward future research that may be needed specific to Black men in this context.

CHAPTER 2

WE MADE IT. NOW WHAT? A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING HOW THE TRANSITION OF BLACK MEN TO A HISTORICALLY BLACK COMMUNITY COLLEGE IS INFLUENCED BY ORIENTATION 101

Introduction

Two-thirds of Black men who start college will never finish (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006a; Palmer et al., 2009). Because the gap in achievement among Black men who pursue postsecondary education exists (Wood & Palmer, 2015), scholars and practitioners are increasingly concerned about outcome disparities between Black men and their peers. When it comes to attaining higher education, Black men overwhelmingly select community colleges but are significantly underachieving after entry (Wood & Palmer, 2015). For instance, only 17.1% of Black men will earn a certificate, degree, or transfer from a community college to a four-year institution within three years (Keflezighi et al., 2016). In contrast, 27% of White men will achieve the same academic goals within the same period (Keflezighi et al., 2016). National data on community colleges show that Black men's completion rates are 41.1%, the lowest among men; completion rates for other men are as follows: Asian Americans, 69.6%; Latinos, 50.3%; and Whites, 54.8% (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). More research is needed to explore how to improve Black men's experiences and outcomes in higher education, particularly within the two-year college context and unique institutional contexts like two-year Historically Black Community Colleges.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), including Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs), may provide the supportive and nurturing environment Black students, including Black men, need to succeed in academia (Palmer et al., 2015). Most literature on the experiences of Black men at HBCUs, however, focuses on four-year institutions, even though Black men are more likely to start their college careers at community colleges (Wood et al., 2016). Such research does not address the experiences of Black men at two-year HBCCs, which could provide key takeaways on how to enhance the performance of Black men.

HBCCs, like their four-year and predominately White community college counterparts, offer various initiatives to support student success. A commonly implemented initiative aimed at getting students set up for success in college is the student success course, often referred to as College 101 (Karp, 2011). Such courses aim to provide students with the tools and resources needed to successfully transition to college (Karp, 2011). While much research supports the effectiveness of student success courses, little is known about the way these courses influence Black men's transition to college within the unique context of an HBCC. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the ways in which a student success course at an HBCC influenced Black men's ability to navigate the transition process to college. Specifically, the study was guided by the following research question: How does a student success course shape the transition of Black men to an HBCC? Better understanding Black men's transition to an HBCC and the role an orientation seminar course may play in this transition can provide valuable insights into ways to support Black men's college success.

Literature Review

Black men are one of the key demographic subgroups community colleges serve (Long, 2016). Specifically, 41% of Black men are enrolled in public two-year institutions (commonly referred to as community colleges; Palmer et al., 2014). While the most significant proportion of Black college men are enrolled in community colleges, the vast literature on Black men in postsecondary education focuses on their experiences and outcomes in four-year colleges and universities (Wood & Williams, 2013). Wood and Hilton (2012) found that less than eight peer-reviewed studies were published on Black men in community colleges from 1971 to 2009. By exploring Black men's transition experiences at an HBCC, this study builds on existing literature of Black men's experiences in higher education, focusing on an institutional context that is underresearched despite serving a large percentage of Black college students.

Black Men's Experiences at College

Black men face many barriers in higher education that lead to their underperformance and low completion rankings. Common barriers are societal messages, generation status, finances, academic factors, student engagement, and peer interactions (Bush et al., 2009; Flowers, 2006; Freeman & Huggans, 2009; Wood et al., 2011). Many of these barriers influence Black men's experiences in higher education, starting with their transition from high school to a postsecondary institution.

Intersections of their race and gender with socio-economic and generation status create unique barriers for Black men in higher education. The overall success and graduation rates for first-in-family, low-income, Black students are much lower than other groups (Aidman & Malerba, 2017). First-generation students, defined as students who are the first in their family to

attend college, are significantly less likely to succeed than those whose parents have earned a college degree (Freeman & Huggans, 2009). These students often encounter systemic barriers while trying to navigate higher education, as higher education institutions are not set up to support their success (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020). For example, first-generation students have been found to do best when their academic learning is connected to their lived experiences (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020); however, that is not often the case in higher education. As many Black students not only identify as first generation but also come from low-income families, socio-economic status also plays an important role in their college success. Financial support factors are among the most important predictors of decisions to leave college for minority students (Heller, 2003; Perna, 2006; St. John, 2002; Swail et al., 2003; Titus, 2006; Wood et al., 2011). For Black men, the inability to pay for college, insufficient financial resources, and the need to financially support their family have a substantial impact on their likelihood of success (Palmer et al., 2014).

Black men also encounter barriers in the classroom that may hinder their academic success; some of these challenges are particularly pronounced at community colleges. For example, being academically integrated—from participating in study groups, interacting with faculty members outside of class, and meeting with academic advisors—is particularly important for Black men’s academic success (Harris & Wood, 2013). Black men at community colleges, however, tend to be less academically integrated than their peers who attend four-year institutions (Harris & Wood, 2013). In addition, faculty support plays a significant role in the success of men of color in community colleges (Bush & Bush, 2010; Flowers, 2006; Pope, 2006; Sutherland, 2011; Wood, 2012a; Wood & Turner, 2010). Societal messages about Black

men's academic abilities or racist stereotypes that depict them as lazy or uninterested in education, however, can influence both students' and educators' views about the likelihood that these students will be successful in community college (Bush et al., 2009). These societal messages may lead to a lack of faculty support for Black men and foster imposter syndrome for this population.

To support Black men's college success, institutions have to foster welcoming and positive campus environments for Black men in and outside of the classroom (Palmer et al., 2014). Specifically, a positive campus climate has been found to be associated with better outcomes for Black men (Beckles, 2008; Roberts, 2009). Student engagement in and outside of the classroom, which consists of students participating in meaningful activities and experiences such as faculty-student collaboration, in-class discussions, peer interactions, and deep active learning (Strayhorn & Devita, 2010), is important for fostering Black men's success in college. However, Flowers (2006) found that Black men in community colleges were less integrated academically and socially than their same-race counterparts in four-year institutions, indicating a need to increase campus engagement for Black men community college students. Peer interaction influences campus engagement among students (Astin, 1993; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2006b; Tinto, 1993). For Black students in higher education, peer groups play an even greater role because they help facilitate a sense of belonging in an institutional milieu that differs significantly from "their ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic background" (Bonner & Bailey, 2006, p. 26).

Institution Types and Initiatives Intended to Support Black Students

Recognizing the systemic barriers Black men face in higher education, higher education leaders have developed a variety of initiatives to support Black students' success. These initiatives range from institution types that focus on supporting Black students to programs geared toward addressing some of the inequities Black students encounter. Research has highlighted the importance of these institution types and support initiatives, though more research is needed to explore how some of these initiatives foster Black men's success in higher education.

HBCUs were established prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Founded and developed in an environment of legal segregation, HBCUs provided access for Black students to higher education and contributed substantially to the progress Black Americans made in improving their status (Hill, 1984). Today, HBCUs are known for providing a supportive and family-like environment that helps to facilitate students' self-efficacy, racial pride, psychological wellness, academic development, and persistence (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Black students at HBCUs reportedly have stronger academic self-concepts, are more satisfied with their college experience, and are engaged at higher levels than their same-race counterparts at PWIs (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper & Gasman, 2008). Despite these positive impacts of HBCUs, some research has noted that a number of HBCUs have high attrition rates because they enroll a higher number of first-generation, low-income, Pell-eligible students (Gasman, 2013). Given these concerns about Black students' success at HBCUs,

Kimbrough and Harper (2006) asserted more research was needed on the experience of Black students at these institutions.

Research has also typically focused on HBCUs, with little being known about Black students' experiences at HBCCs (Elliot et al., 2019). Though HBCCs have historically extended educational opportunity like their four-year and predominately White counterparts, limited research has explored how HBCCs support the social mobility of their students, specifically Black men (Elliot et al., 2019). Elucidating Black men's experiences at HBCCs can help to better integrate the institutions into existing research and advocacy platforms and may lead to practical implications, such as building capacity and fostering collaboration with other HBCUs, minority-serving institutions (MSIs), and community colleges (Elliot et al., 2019).

These initiatives facilitate campus engagement among Black men (BMIs; Bledsoe & Rome, 2006; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper & Harris, 2012; Palmer et al., 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2012). Many BMIs are research based in that program development and implementation are informed by research and theory (Palmer et al., 2014). To this end, they function to foster academic and social integration, student engagement, and sense of belonging and create a welcoming and affirming campus environment for Black men (Palmer et al., 2014). Many community colleges have retention programs and BMIs to help facilitate the success of Black men (Wood, 2011; Wood & Harris, 2013), but there is little research to assess the efficacy of these programs (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Besides initiatives focused on supporting Black men, in particular, many institutions have adapted programs such as student success courses, often called College 101, to support students in their transition to college. Successful college transition requires more than a student's ability

to perform academically. These courses often strive to provide a venue for relationship building and information provision and for giving students an extended opportunity to apply and practice skills and habits needed to be successful in college (Karp, 2011). Students who lack nonacademic skills like study techniques and time management and are not socially connected to their peers and the institution are unlikely to be successful in college, even if they have the required academic skills (Karp et al., 2012). Moreover, by helping students develop college-based relationships and familiarity with the college campus and services, students are better able to integrate into the institution and ultimately their persistence (Karp et al., 2012). Research has indeed found improvements in credit accumulation, persistence to the second year, and transfer rates to four-year institutions for students who enrolled in student success courses in their freshman year at a community college (Cho & Karp, 2012; Zeidenberg et. al., 2007). While much literature supports the benefits of college success courses, more research is needed to understand how these courses foster Black male students' successful transition to college within the unique context of an HBCC.

Theoretical Framework

This case study was guided by Nancy K. Schlossberg's transition theory. Schlossberg's transition theory provides a systematic framework for counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other helpers as they listen to the many stories of navigating a transition — each one unique — of colleagues, friends, and clients (Anderson et al., 2012). The theory posits that while transitions and individuals differ, the structure for understanding individuals in transition is stable (Anderson et al., 2012). The transition theory highlights three important aspects to navigating how individuals move in, through, and out of transitions: (a) Approaching Transitions

(transition identification and transition process), (b) Taking Stock of coping resources (the 4 S system), and (c) Taking Charge (strengthening resources). I will discuss each of these aspects next.

Approaching Transitions identifies the nature of the transition and provides an understanding of which perspective is the best for dealing with the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Transition identification explores change that is impending – in this case, the transition to college - and whether it is anticipated, unanticipated, or a nonevent (Anderson et al., 2012). Even more important than mere identification of the change is understanding the degree to which the transition changes the individual's life (Anderson et al., 2012).

Taking Stock of coping resources through the 4 S system provides a way to identify the potential resources someone possesses to cope with the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). These four major sets of factors influence the ability of the individual to cope during a transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

1. The *Situation* variable looks at what is happening. For example, an individual's transition to college will vary whether they have dependents to take care of at this time or not. Thus, each individual's unique situation and context will shape how the individual experiences a transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

2. The *Self* variable focuses on characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Anderson et al. (2012) identified the following characteristics that are particularly relevant for individuals as they cope with change: socio-economic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture,

psychological resources, ego development, outlook optimism and self-efficacy, commitment and values, and spirituality and resilience.

3. The *Support* variable pertains to what help is available. Support and available options vary for each individual (Anderson et al., 2012). Support systems can come in many forms: affirmation, aid, social relationships, organizations, and institutions (Anderson et al., 2012). By exploring how a student success course influenced Black men's transition to college, this study examines one of the support systems available to Black men as they transition to HBCCs.

4. The *Strategies* variable involves a person's ability to cope. People navigate transitions in different ways (Anderson et al., 2012). Support systems like student success courses often aim to teach students strategies for successfully navigating their transition to college.

Taking Charge by strengthening resources demonstrates the use of new strategies (Anderson et al., 2012). Even though some transitions are out of an individual's control, one can control the way one manages them—specifically, an individual can strengthen their resources, i.e., the 4 S's.

Schlossberg's transition theory has been applied in previous research focused on underserved and underprivileged communities transitioning to college. For example, Schooler (2014) found that Schlossberg and colleagues' (1995) transition theory is widely applicable to guiding Native American students in their first year of college (Schooler, 2014). The level of financial, family, and institutional support influences a student's decision to persist to graduation or leave college (Schooler, 2014). Furthermore, the characteristics a student brings with him or her to the institution, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, culture, and spirituality have a large impact on a student's experience during college (Schooler, 2014) While Schooler (2014)

found Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition theory to be useful in studying the transition experiences of Native Americans, Schooler (2014) also noted that the theory does not capture the critical issues of Native American students' transitions into college life. Thus, Schooler (2014) combined Schlossberg's theory with other transition models to form the Native American college student transition theory. Because literature on Black men transitioning to an HBCC is sparse, there is no unique transition theory for this population and the unique college setting. This study will thus be guided by Schlossberg's transition theory; however, throughout the data collection and analysis process, I was open to findings that may deviate from the theory due to the unique population and context I was studying.

Methods

To provide insight into the ways in which a student success course influences the transition process of Black men to an HBCC, I conducted a descriptive qualitative case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case studies require intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bound by space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, the case was a student success course at one specific institution, facilitated in Spring and Fall semesters of 2021.

The epistemological approach to explore the perceptions of Black men's transition to an HBCC is rooted in the constructivist worldview. Constructivists assume that reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, constructivists believe there are multiple realities or interpretations of a single event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretations, flowing from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The researcher's intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The constructivist worldview aligned with this case study because I wanted to explore how Black men made sense of their experiences in the student success course as they transitioned to the HBCC.

Research Site

Toussaint State Community College (TSCC) is a HBCC servicing 3,274 students. The college is located in a predominately Black neighborhood and is within a 5-mile radius of the neighborhood's K-8 school and high school. Notable visitors to the campus include Colin Powell, the first African American secretary of state, and Barack Obama, the 44th president, and first African American president of the United States. President Obama was accompanied by his wife, Michelle Obama, the first African American first lady of the United States. Minority enrollment is 81% of the student body (majority Black), which is more than the state average of 39%. At TSCC, the graduation rate is 19% within 150% normal time; the retention rate is 51% and the transfer-out rate is 24% as of August 31, 2020. TSCC is one of 15 HBCCs in the U.S. Graduation rates of American Indian or Alaska Native students is 0%, Asian students is 100%, Black (non-Hispanic) students is 17.1%, Hispanic students is 40%, White students is 27%, and students of two or more races is 20% at TSCC. However, Black men, specifically, have the lowest graduation rate at 12.6%. Hispanic men graduate at a rate of 50% and White men at 33.3%. Black men make up 28% of the student population. These statistics highlight that TSCC has a higher than average enrollment of Black students, but the graduation rates are low. Not only are the graduation rates low in general, but when compared to other student groups, Black men graduate the least. This data indicates that there is a problem with Black men's academic

success that requires research to better understand what the reasons for this gap in achievement may be.

In 2010, Toussaint State Community College's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was designed to help students learn to better navigate the scope and depth of what a full college experience has to offer; improve student engagement levels; broaden individual skills, abilities, and horizons; strengthen intellectual and individual responsibility and independence; and actively involve students in the learning process. Part of this plan was to revamp the Freshman Academy (ORI 101). The Freshman Academy at Toussaint State Community College is a mandatory one-credit course designed to equip, engage, and empower students and provides students with an array of experimental learning opportunities geared toward specific student learning outcomes. Each expected outcome addresses a specific and targeted area that the college (faculty, staff, students, and administrators), the community, and other stakeholders, as well as strategic planning data indicated as areas in need of improvement. The targeted areas include technology skills, critical thinking skills, communication skills (oral, written, and listening), social skills, time management skills, study skills, leadership skills, and accepting personal responsibility.

The Freshman Academy has four goals. The first goal is to empower students to discover and construct knowledge that will impact their academic, social, and personal choices. The second goal is engaging students in the learning process to be responsible college students. Third, ORI 101 is committed to equipping students with the skills and resources to be successful in and out of the classroom. The fourth goal focuses on the integrity and intellect that students develop to be self-reliant, self-assured, to own their individual decisions. In addition to the ORI

101 goals, there are four intended student learning outcomes. After ORI 101, students should possess the ability to use online technologies effectively in a collegiate environment; employ critical thinking skills and logical thought processes in problem solving and decision making; communicate effectively and proficiently using written, oral, and listening skills; and engage successfully in social and teamwork activities.

Participants

I employed purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to recruit degree-seeking Black men classified as first-time, first-year students with declared majors between the ages of the 18-25 who have taken Freshmen Academy (ORI 101). Sampling in qualitative inquiry is characterized as purposeful; that is, sampling for information-rich cases holds the greatest potential for generating insight about the phenomenon of interest (Jones et al., 2014). Black men who had completed ORI 101 were eligible for this study. While this study was open to both full-time and part-time students, all participants who completed the interview identified as full-time students.

After receiving approval by the Institutional Review Board, I recruited 15 Black men by cold calling and subsequently using a participant questionnaire to determine eligibility for the study. Participants completed an informed consent form at the beginning of the interview. I also verbally restated the importance of confidentiality at the time of the interviews, reviewed the consent form again, and informed participants that they had the right to withdraw from participation at any time of the study. Participants were of traditional college-student age. The majority of participants took ORI 101 as a virtual (synchronous) or online (distance education-asynchronous) course, offered in the latter course modality due to the C-19 pandemic. For participant demographics and course modality of ORI 101, please see Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Demographics and Course Delivery

Name	Age	Enrollment Status and Year in College	Method of Delivery of ORI 101	Time of delivery
Tobie	18	Freshman	Online	Fall Mini term 1
Brian	18	Freshman	In-person	Fall Mini term 1
Hernando	20	Sophomore	Virtual	Fall Mini term 1
Wilton	19	Freshman	Virtual	Fall Mini term 1
Anthony	18	Freshman	In-person	Fall Mini term 1
Tristine	20	Sophomore	In-person	Fall Mini term 1
Erik	19	Freshman	Virtual	Fall Mini term 1
Kamal	22	Sophomore	In-person	Fall Mini term 1
Derek	21	Sophomore	Virtual	Fall Mini term 1
Kendrick	19	Freshman	Virtual	Fall Mini term 1
Arthur	19	Freshman	Virtual	Fall Mini term 1
David	19	Freshman	Virtual	Fall Mini term 1
Bryant	19	Freshman	Online	Spring Mini term 1
Marvin	19	Freshman	Virtual	Fall Mini term 1
Nigel	18	Freshman	In-person	Fall Mini term 1

Data Collection

The main data source for this study was interviews with 15 participants to gain insight into the ways in which ORI 101 influenced Black men's transition to an HBCC. Interviews are a common form of data collection in qualitative case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although time consuming, individual interviews are necessary to yield significant amounts of

rich information (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The questions for the interviews were designed to gain insight into the transition experiences of Black men and the ways Black men perceived ORI 101 as shaping their transition. The questions were broken down into five sections guided by Schlossberg's transition theory, which framed this study. I took a semistructured approach to the interviews to allow for the use of a predetermined interview protocol but also allow flexibility in wording questions and the ability to ask follow-up questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The interviews lasted 45 minutes, were conducted on Zoom, and were recorded. The recordings were used for transcription with subsequent analysis.

I supplemented interview data with document analysis of the ORI 101 syllabus and End of Course Survey data. The ORI 101 syllabus, which is standard for all sections offered, provided me with background information about the course, including the course description, course goals, student learning outcomes (SLOs), course activities, materials needed, and additional student information. The End of Course Survey is administered to students in the final weeks of the course and includes 51 closed-ended questions answered on a rating scale (e.g., from strongly agree to strongly disagree). The questions are designed to survey how students felt about ORI 101's success regarding their online technology skills, critical thinking skills, communication skills, and social skills. The surveys were from Fall 2018 to Spring 2021 with a total of 672 respondents. The survey results were used to compare the responses of interview participants with responses of a larger number of ORI 101 students to examine whether information shared by interview respondents reflected the experiences of other students in the course.

Data Analysis

Data were organized by transcribing the student responses, typing notes, and sorting data for reading. Reading the data provided a sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once the data were organized, I used Tesch's eight steps in the coding process (as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to code the data. By using this technique, I was able to extract themes related to the transition of Black men to an HBCC and how ORI 101 shaped those experiences.

In the first step, I read all the transcriptions carefully and recorded ideas as I read to get a sense of all the interview data. I also labeled the interview virtual (synchronous), online (distance education/asynchronous), or ground (face-to-face) to distinguish the delivery method of ORI 101. This was done to explore how course delivery impacted the participants. Second, I reviewed each interview transcript, asking myself, "What is this data about?" It was my intention to focus on the underlying meaning and write thoughts down as I reviewed the transcript. After reviewing several transcripts as described in step two, I made a list of all topics as my third step in data analysis. I then clustered together similar topics and formed topics into columns arrayed as major, unique, and leftover topics. In the fourth step, I took the list I created and went back to the data. I used short phrases instead of abbreviations and wrote them next to the appropriate segments of the text in the transcriptions. This preliminary organizing scheme uncovered new categories or codes. In the fifth step, I found the most descriptive wording for data topics and turned them into categories. I looked for ways to reduce my total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Drawing lines between categories showed interrelationships. In the sixth step, I made a final decision on the final categories and alphabetized these codes.

Seventh, I assembled the data material belonging to each category in one place and devised the final themes. The eighth step is only performed if it is necessary to recode the data. This was not necessary for this study.

Trustworthiness

Multiple approaches were used to establish the trustworthiness of research findings. I used rich, thick description to convey findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By incorporating longer direct quotes and detailed descriptions of the interviews into my findings, I hope to offer an in-depth glimpse into the perspectives of Black men at an HBCC and present the data to be more realistic and richer (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure my interpretations accurately reflect participants' experiences, I used member checking in the form of a focus group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once I developed emerging themes, I reached out to participants and set up a focus group. During this focus group, I shared the themes with students and asked them to share initial reactions, thoughts, and any other feedback they may have about the themes. Based on participants' input, I revised themes as needed. Triangulation was used to examine evidence from different sources and build coherent justification of themes pertaining to this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, I triangulated the data by examining evidence from interviews, student surveys, and the ORI 101 syllabus. Finally, use of peer debriefing further enhanced trustworthiness by allowing peer debriefers to review and ask questions about the qualitative study so that the account can resonate with people outside of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For my peer debriefing, I chose one member from my cohort, one colleague, and my dissertation committee.

Findings

Four themes emerged from the data analysis. These themes revealed that, overall, ORI 101 provided support to Black men as they transitioned to the HBCC. Specifically, ORI 101 increased essential college skills for Black men when delivered synchronously online and in person and helped Black men navigate campus, and ORI instructor's support improved the transition for Black men. Findings, however, highlight that many participants were unaware of the institution's HBCC status because ORI 101 lacked culturally relevant information about the institution and its history. Excluding this content from ORI 101 led to missed opportunities for participants unaware of the institution's HBCC status.

ORI 101 Increased Essential College Skills for Black Men When Delivered Synchronously Online and In-Person

Participants felt they learned unique skills from ORI 101 that helped them transition to TSCC. Overall, the End of Course Surveys from Spring 2021 show that 91% of students feel that ORI 101 is beneficial to new students. The syllabus indicates that one of the goals of ORI 101 is to equip students with the skills and resources to be successful in and out of the classroom. Student survey responses from Spring 2021 indicate that on average, 86% of ORI 101 students felt that the course improved their skills. Specifically, 85% of ORI 101 students agreed that ORI 101 helped them to improve their oral and written communication skills, 83% agreed that ORI 101 helped them to understand the dynamics of group work better, and 88% agreed that ORI 101 helped them to become a more effective group member

Interview participants similarly highlighted the different skills they learned in ORI 101 when sessions were delivered synchronously online or in person. Participants further indicated

that they were intentionally using these skills to be successful at TSCC. For example, Wilton, who took the course virtually, shared:

I really don't know how to study, and they gave me some study tips and habits in that class. Listening to other classmates, I gained a little wisdom I could say, from the different types of things, like how to stay on task at something and how to keep focus and tips on how to be consistent when it comes to goals. I actually use a planner now.

ORI 101 provided Wilton with skills and strategies on how to be successful in college. He learned these skills and strategies not only from the information shared by the instructor but also by listening to his peers. The new knowledge he gained led him to change his behaviors (e.g., using a planner), which he believes helped him adjust to the academic expectations at the institution.

Kendrick, another virtual student, similarly learned specific strategies from his ORI 101 course that supported him in having a smoother transition to college academics. He said:

I learned a lot in ORI 101, especially based on the time management information. Time management gave me more motivation because I was better prepared for what I had to do. Even right now or even before class, I can always do something productive. I can always make time to sit down and study. Everything I learned from orientation to college has helped me be a better student. You know what I'm saying? It also taught me how to be more talkative and use good communication skills and just be try to be the best all the time.

Kendrick highlighted key skills that he learned from his synchronous virtual experience that are helping him stay motivated and be as productive as possible. By providing Kendrick with strategies to do well in college, ORI 101 helped Kendrick adjust to academic expectations and eased his transition.

Participants who were able to take ORI 101 as a face-to-face course similarly highlighted skills they gained from the course while also emphasizing that the face-to-face modality was crucial in providing some of these benefits. For example, Anthony, a freshman, shared:

I really feel like the in-person orientation sessions I went to help me work through my communication strategies. We had to go because attendance was a big part of the class. I was already working on this, being that I'm new on campus. It also helped me learn how to network by being in groups for assignments as well. Also, before, I got to campus, I had heard about Dean Austin, but I didn't know what his face looked like, and I didn't know exactly who he was. Since I was on campus for ORI 101, I ended up running into Dean Austin, and it was exciting to connect with him in person and talk about student activities.

Like Wilton and Kendrick, Anthony shared specific skills he gained from ORI 101. However, he credits the face-to-face modality for allowing him to improve these skills. As Anthony explained, attendance is an important aspect of ORI 101 courses. The ORI 101 syllabus specifically states: "It is simple. Attend class. This course is designed to be very engaging and has lots of embedded activities. Students with poor attendance will not be successful. So, one of the most important lessons one can learn as a new college student is the importance of attending, not just this class, but all your classes." Anthony's comment highlights the importance of this attendance policy in fostering students' development of skills and the benefits of offering face-to-face sections of ORI 101.

Adversely, participants who took the course asynchronously online did not experience the same enhancement to their transition. These students were responsible for completing the course at a self-pace with minimal instructor or peer contact. Tobie shared his experience about the asynchronous online modality by saying:

I'd rather have taken the course in person because you probably would've learned more in-person than online. Honestly, even though I was in the class, I didn't really pay attention like that in there. From the start, the instructor said, "If you finish all the assignments before the semester is over, that's your grade, so that's what I did. I attended some seminars that they held, but honestly, I don't think the class help me with strategies for college.

As an asynchronous online student, Tobie didn't feel like he learned strategies in his transition and his transition to college wasn't improved by ORI 101. Because the completion of the course was emphasized over quality of engagement, Tobie chose to complete the course as quickly as possible, which hindered his ability to gain valuable skills from the course.

Like Tobie, Bryant, another asynchronous online student, did not feel that he gained much from ORI 101. He explained:

Orientation ain't really affected me either way. I mean, I'm pretty neutral about it. I think because it was online, it was nothing really. . . I don't know. I was just online—so it was just like, I'm just behind this screen. Like a robot, you know what I mean?

Being online did not encourage Bryant to engage in the course content and, like Tobie, he did not believe that the course influenced his transition to college. Tobie's and Bryant's experiences highlight the importance of ORI 101 being offered as either a virtual (synchronous) or face-to-face course to allow for students to develop important skills and strategies that support students as they transition to college.

ORI 101 Helped Black Men Navigate Campus

Being able to navigate a new environment proved to be a vital strategy needed for the transition to college. Participants highlighted that ORI 101 helped them learn where or to whom to go when they needed support and how to approach various situations related to academic support, student services, and career advice. Participant responses on the End of Course Survey from Spring 2021 showed that ORI 101 enhanced navigational skills. Almost all (96%) of students who took ORI 101 agreed that they learned how to navigate to locations and online resources in the course.

Students were taught how to navigate the campus through modules that taught students how to navigate the website and instructed students to schedule appointments to various resource locations on campus (i.e., advising center, library, tutoring center, etc.). Arthur, a freshmen and synchronous virtual student, shared how the information presented in ORI 1010 helped him learn about campus resources:

That class was actually very helpful. I was running around campus confused a little bit. So, orientation showed me how to use the school's website and showed me where everything is around campus and say if I were into any academic trouble, I would know who to go to. . .

Arthur had struggled to navigate campus and identify the right resources prior to taking ORI 101. The course helped him learn how to navigate online resources as well as the physical campus; he also felt more confident in knowing whom to reach out to should he need assistance. While Arthur had not used those resources yet, knowing how to find them seemed to make him feel more confident in knowing how to navigate potential challenges he may encounter in college.

Another participant, David, a freshman, also mentioned how the course helped him navigate his new environment:

The biggest thing it helped me with was navigation, just knowing what to do, knowing how to work the system, how to go about it at the college level, being professional. It definitely helped me with that. It helped with my communication skills as far as reaching my professor and having issues with a grade or an assignment or having trouble.

Similar to Arthur, David highlighted new knowledge, skills, and strategies he learned that helped him navigate college. His comments showed that he applied this newly gained navigational capital to improve his situation, for example, related to interacting with professors. He also seems to feel more confident in his ability to navigate the college environment, something that likely helped with his transition to college. Other participants noted how the information

provided made them feel safer on campus. For example, Erik, also a freshman, shared, “The course talked about things like how to navigate on the website, it talked about safety and regulations, different laws and rules that the school has, like for instance, bullying and harassment. For instance, gun safety violation.” Like Arthur and David, Erik highlighted new knowledge about campus and college expectations that he gained, though for Erik knowing how to find and being aware of safety-related policies and regulations seemed to stand out the most. Whether participants had questions about rules and policies like Erik, wanted to know more about how to navigate online resources or the physical campus, or what resources to seek for different situations, ORI 101 provided them with the ability to find that information, which seemed to make students feel more comfortable at the institution and more confident in their ability to succeed.

ORI 101 Expanded Black Men’s Support Network

Participants highlighted that ORI 101 expanded their support network. While all participants talked about their family members who supported them throughout their transition to TSCC, they also indicated a need for having a support network on campus, something they were able to gain through ORI 101. In particular, participants highlighted their relationship with and mentoring by their ORI 101 instructors. On the End of Course Surveys from Spring 2021, 95% of ORI 101 students agreed that their facilitator motivated and encouraged them to be successful, 95% agreed that the facilitator helped to improve group dynamics, and 95% agreed that the facilitator was highly effective and engaged. In interviews, participants further explained how

ORI 101 instructors provided support that helped them in their transition to college. For example,

Tristine, who took ORI 101 in person, expressed:

The instructor definitely supported me. Even after I finished orientation I would run into my teacher on campus. I ended up running into her a lot. I think she did a really great job and she also had a great spirit. It was just very kind and she just reminded me of the things I needed to do in the classroom, and made it known that I could always reach out to her. She laid it all on the table for us.

Tristine developed a relationship with his ORI 101 instructor that extended beyond the completion of the course. Besides having a positive relationship with the instructor, Tristine highlighted how the instructor helped him adjust to college course expectations by clearly identifying the tasks to complete for the course and emphasizing the importance of reaching out to the instructor when having questions. More importantly, Tristine seemed to see his instructor as a person he could go to and rely on for support.

Erik, who took a synchronous virtual ORI 101, also had a positive experience with his instructor. He shared:

She's a great teacher. It's not just me. . . I felt like she wanted everybody to succeed in it. Her vibe gave off a mindset that she wants everybody to be at a high point in life. She didn't want anybody struggling in the class. She said that we all needed somebody to get through college.

Like, Tristine, Erik highlighted the instructor's supportive behavior and message to the students. Erik's and Tristine's instructors both seemed to normalize the need for a support system in college, whether it was by indicating that "everyone needed somebody to get through college," as in the case of Erik's instructor, or emphasizing her own availability if students had questions, as in the case of Tristine's instructor. Thus, by developing positive relationships with their students, providing students with knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their course and college more generally, and normalizing the need to seek out support, ORI 101 instructors

supported their students in their transition to college and their adjustment to college-level courses.

ORI 101 Lacked Culturally Relevant Information on HBCC Status

ORI 101 did not provide any information concerning the institution's HBCC status in the course syllabus information or its course content. Because of this, many participants were unaware of the institution's HBCC status and, thus, missed out on opportunities to connect with the history and culture of the institution. Participants who were aware of the HBCC status highlighted how this knowledge influenced their college choice and transition to college.

Interviews revealed that only 6 of 15 participants were aware that TSCC was an HBCC prior to attending. None of the 15 participants received any of this information in ORI 101. For example, sophomore student-athlete Hernando, a sophomore, shared:

I didn't know TSCC was a HBCC initially, so the school being a HBCU wasn't a factor in my transition. I found out this year when I was talking to the assistant coach I think.

Hernando was not aware that TSCC was an HBCC until his sophomore year. Similarly, Tristine, a sophomore, was unaware of TSCC's HBCC status:

I didn't know TSCC was an HBCC until yesterday when you called me. That was my first time hearing it, so being an HBCC hasn't made a difference in my experience here.

Like Hernando, Tristine had no knowledge that TSCC was an HBCC when he started college or throughout his first year in college. Considering that HBCCs are known for providing a welcoming atmosphere to Black students, having this information as Hernando and Tristine transitioned to the

institution may have helped ease their transition or allowed them to approach the transition to TSCC differently.

Participants who were aware of TSCC's status as an HBCC discussed how this information shaped their college choice and transition to college. For example, Nigel shared:

I found out TSCC was an HBCC on a campus tour during senior year. Most of the schools I've went to were mostly White, so I just wanted to be around more Black people as I got older, and that's why I came to TSCC. I grew up mostly around White people and my dad coached at all-Black high schools, but I never attended those schools. So, my educational experience has always been mostly White, so yeah, transitioning to TSCC showed me that I like the HBCU life or HBCC life. I like the HBCU culture at TSCC. I'll also likely transfer to a four-year HBCU as well. The biggest two HBCUs I want to attend next is between Florida A&M University and Southern University.

Nigel's comments highlight how valuable situational awareness involving HBCC status can be for Black men. Nigel chose TSCC because of its HBCC status, since he desired more cultural interaction with Black people than his previous educational experience had provided. Nigel's satisfaction at TSCC can be interpreted such that he feels supported by the HBCC culture as he plans to continue to a four-year HBCU. He appears to use the strategy of attending an HBCC to become more self-aware and gain social capital with other Black college students.

Kamal was also intentional about his decision to attend TSCC because of its HBCC status.

Kamal shared:

I liked the fact that TSCC was an HBCU, and it was in Alabama, because I know it's a lot of Black history in Alabama. I'm from Minnesota, but don't get it twisted, it's a lot of Black people where I'm from, but its not historical like Alabama. When I was searching online for TSCC, I found out it was an HBCU, and when I was calling to get my records straight, Black ladies were answering the phone so I felt like they could relate to me.

Kamal seemed to have a strong affinity toward attending an HBCU, specifically one in Alabama, because of his knowledge of the rich Black history associated with the Civil Rights Movement.

Kamal's comment also indicates that he experienced a sense of belonging when staff members

he talked to were Black women. Kamal's and Nigel's quotes show glimpses of participants' desire to be at an HBCC to affirm their social identity and the comfort they may experience knowing they are attending an HBCC and interacting with Black staff members at an HBCC.

Arthur, a freshman, shared:

Because TSCC is an HBCU, it is mostly Black students, faculty, and staff. During my first semester, I realized I felt more comfortable at TSCC because of the demographics of the school. I felt more secure, and I felt more open about myself. I felt like I could express myself at this school and I felt like I had everything I needed. It was easier to network for me, which helped me become a team manager and student ambassador. I'll admit it was a little rocky for me because personally, I'm used to being a part of a diverse group of people but I wasn't around people like me. So, for me overcoming that culture shock and it helped me learn more about myself by attending an HBCC.

Arthur's comment highlights how the HBCC environment has influenced his transition to college in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, he felt more comfortable and was able to network, which allowed him to get more involved on campus; on the other hand, his transition was "rocky" at first as he was not used to being around a majority of Black individuals. Arthur may have benefitted from opportunities to reflect on the HBCC status in ORI 101 to help him sort through these experiences and feelings.

Discussion

Through this research, I found that ORI 101 positively influenced the transition of Black men to TSCC, an HBCC. This student success course equipped Black men with essential college skills that promote college success, the ability to successfully navigate campus, and an expanded support network through their course instructor. Interviews with participants revealed the importance of ORI 101 being delivered synchronously online or in person for those benefits to

occur, as participants in asynchronous online courses did not report these same benefits.

Moreover, participants revealed that ORI 101 didn't provide culturally relevant information on the college's HBCC status, which led to missed opportunities to leverage the unique campus history and culture when supporting Black men in their transition to TSCC.

Using Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012) to analyze my findings highlights that ORI 101 fostered the development of strategies students could use to navigate their transition to college. Specifically, participants felt ORI 101 improved skills needed for college-level academic work, which included oral and written communication skills, group work and group member skills, study skills, and time management skills. These skills are also taught in BMIs and MMIs, which have played a critical role in employing services that improve Black men's college success (Keflezighi et al., 2016). These programs show that when Black men learn these important skills, increased retention and persistence can occur at HBCUs (Palmer et al., 2013).

In addition to these newly learned skills, ORI 101 provided student-participants with valuable information and strategies for navigating college. Specifically, participants learned how to find physical locations on campus and how to search for information on the college website. This knowledge enabled participants to better locate resource persons and programs on campus. When campuses offer a strong multidimensional approach similar to TSCC's ORI 101, Black men benefit from these campus initiatives. Multidimensional initiatives range from social programming to mentoring and academic support (Harper & Harris, 2012). These initiatives are designed to include a mix of programs targeted at Black men throughout the school year (Harper & Harris, 2012). Two goals that resonate across these programs are to provide social support to

make campuses more welcoming and affirming and to share knowledge and resources needed to successfully navigate college (Harper & Harris, 2012). Ultimately, this navigational strategy improved the overall situation of the participants, improved their confidence, and made them feel more comfortable on campus.

My findings also indicate that ORI 101 helped participants expand their support network. Similar to previous research (e.g., Palmer et al., 2014), all participants in this study highlighted how their family supported them and their decision to attend community college. With this in mind, ORI 101 was a key way that the TSCC was able to add to Black men's support system. Schlossberg's transition theory highlights the importance of having a support system when navigating a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). One of the most important individuals added to students' support system was the ORI 101 instructors, who strove to establish rapport with their students. Research has shown a relationship between faculty interaction and multiple educational gains, including academic skill development, leadership ability, occupational values, and gains in educational aspirations (Sax et al., 2005). Previous research has shown that when Black men have nurturing and welcoming relationships with faculty, they are more successful in college (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Wood & Palmer, 2012). However, similar to their counterparts at four-year predominately White institutions, Black men in community colleges often perceive faculty to be unsupportive and apathetic toward their success (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood, 2012c). By normalizing the need for help and making themselves available, ORI 101 instructors seemed to create a climate where participants felt comfortable going to them for help. As ORI 101 is one of the first courses Black men take at TSCC, this course can shape students' expectations for how to interact with college instructors.

In addition to highlighting the ways ORI 101 fostered strategies and support for navigating the transition to college, my findings also show how students' experiences vary based on the modality of their ORI 101 course. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the institution's course delivery for ORI 101, which was mostly offered fully online or synchronously online. During the time of this research, there were a few face-to-face courses offered to students. ORI 101 at TSCC was designed to be very engaging through group work and peer interaction. Student engagement is not only a challenge in traditional face-to-face classrooms but also, and debatably more so, in online courses (Khan et al., 2017). Online course delivery faces additional barriers to engaging students not typically present in face-to-face courses (Khan et al., 2017). Effective time and resource management is necessary on the part of both the students as well as faculty when online; methods of encouraging student communication and interactions among themselves and with faculty differ greatly from face-to-face delivery methods (Khan et al., 2017). Oftentimes, the efficient implementation of teaching tools used to deliver the online course is a challenge for many faculty (Khan et al., 2017). Participants in this study who were enrolled in fully online ORI 101 courses experienced some of these challenges, and they expressed a lack of interest and engagement. Furthermore, participants in asynchronous online courses indicated that they did not receive the same benefits from ORI 101—the development of strategies and a support network to navigate transitions—as their peers in face-to-face or synchronous online courses. The findings of this study thus highlight the importance of offering student success courses like ORI 101 in face-to-face or synchronous online modalities, in particular for Black men.

Lastly, my findings indicate missed opportunities to leverage TSCC's HBCC status in supporting Black men in their transition to college. HBCUs are often described in literature as

supportive and nurturing environments for Black students (Palmer et al., 2015). These institutions have maintained this supportive ethos by providing Black students with an abundance of social capital to help them navigate the institutional environment (Brown & Davis, 2001; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Specifically, HBCUs are known for providing a supportive and family-like environment that helps facilitate students' self-efficacy, racial pride, psychological wellness, academic development, and persistence (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Participants in this study revealed that ORI 101 didn't promote the institution's HBCC status. By not including this information in the ORI 101 course, participants may have missed out on taking advantage of the unique opportunities that the HBCC environment may have provided. The participants who were aware of the HBCC status shared more feelings of comfort and confidence in the institution, the faculty, and staff to provide them with a family-like environment. One participant talked specifically about the positive experience of reaching out to staff, who were predominately Black. Participants who may not have been aware of TSCC's HBCC status may have avoided reaching out to staff, assuming that most staff members would identify as White, similar to what they encountered in their previous educational experiences. As previous research indicates that Black men at community colleges are reluctant to seek help because they may feel unwelcome or perceive a lack of institutional support (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood, 2012c), highlighting the institution's HBCC status and sharing information on the benefits of attending an HBCC during ORI 101—such as supportive relationships with faculty and staff (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002)—could encourage Black men to seek out faculty or staff support when needed. My findings thus align with previous research that highlights the need for HBCU faculty and staff to be intentional in encouraging student

engagement and help seeking to achieve the benefits often associated with their HBCU status (Palmer & Maramba, 2012). By failing to leverage its HBCC status, TSCC missed out on promoting behaviors in Black men that are often connected to positive college outcomes (Palmer et al., 2009). It is also important to note that the transition to an HBCC is one of many transitions that Black men will potentially experience in academia. Ideally, many Black men enrolled in community colleges will transition to higher levels of academic success, which may include four-year institutions through a doctoral degree. Skills and strategies learned during a course like ORI 101 and the support networks that are formed could become essential in providing Black men with the resources needed to navigate these future transitions.

Implications for Future Research

Black men in community colleges continue to underperform in comparison to other student groups. Recently, the national college completion rates for men of color, particularly Black men, at open and broad-access postsecondary institutions (including community colleges) lag behind completion rates for White students and for women students of any race or ethnicity (Manno et al., 2020). The research from this study indicates that students are learning some college skills they need in ORI 101 and that ORI 101 is achieving its goals and outcomes. More research is needed to see what additional skills and strategies for navigating college-level courses are needed for Black men to be successful. Further research in these areas could lead to revamping the goals of ORI 101 or potentially adding additional support mechanisms beyond ORI 101. There is also a need for research on how ORI 101 impacts commonly used success measures (GPA, retention, graduation rates, etc.) of Black men at community colleges.

While this study strove to incorporate both full-time and part-time students, all participants who completed interviews were full-time students. Thus, a limitation of this study is the lack of part-time students' perspectives on the ways in which ORI 101 may have influenced their transition. Future research should explore how part-time students experience the transition to an HBCC and how student success courses may influence that transition for part-time students.

Implications for Practice

This research revealed potential implications for practice that could maximize the effectiveness of ORI 101 at TSCC for Black men, and potentially Black men at other HBCCs. First, I found that synchronous and in-person sections of ORI 101 were more effective than fully online courses. HBCCs should strive to offer student success courses only as synchronous or in-person sections to meet the needs of Black men students. If student success courses have to be offered in an asynchronous modality, faculty should develop creative ways to allow for peer-to-peer and faculty-student engagement to still achieve the positive outcomes of synchronous and face-to-face courses.

Second, I found that ORI 101 fostered the development of skills, strategies, and support networks that contribute to students' academic and nonacademic success. When developing student success course curricula, faculty should be intentional to include information on skills and strategies needed to navigate college. Moreover, faculty should intentionally provide opportunities for students to expand their support networks. As ORI 101 instructors were important members of Black men's support network and provided valuable insights to Black men on how to engage with college faculty, instructor training for college success courses could

include information on mentoring and relationship building. This type of training can ensure that all students are able to have these types of relationships with their ORI 101 instructors.

Finally, HBCCs should highlight and leverage their unique status as an HBCC using as many different strategies as possible. Student success courses like ORI 101 can be an effective way to help students connect to the unique status and community of an HBCC. With such a small number of HBCCs in existence, it is important for these institutions to embrace and market their HBCU status. Highlighting the HBCC status could increase enrollment of Black students at these community colleges. In addition, including information on the institution's HBCC status and the benefits of this status in student success courses, institutions could promote expectations and behaviors by their Black men students that foster their academic and personal success. Specifically, student success courses may incorporate modules on the history and benefits of HBCCs, discuss the campus climate at the HBCC, showcase opportunities for engagement and interactions with faculty and staff, and highlight how students can take full advantage of the HBCC aspect of their institution. The HBCC status may also provide opportunities for funding to enhance the student services and technology associated with its ORI 101 programming.

Conclusion

Community college will continue to play a critical role in providing opportunities for Black men to access postsecondary education as many of the Black men in four-year colleges started off at community colleges (Palmer et al., 2014). This study has shown that Black men can benefit from student success courses at community colleges because these courses can promote the development of important skills, strategies, and support networks needed to navigate college. This study, however, also highlights that HBCCs may miss out on important opportunities to

support Black men in their transition to college when they fail to leverage their HBCC status. HBCCs will remain a unique sector in the community college and HBCU community. By embracing their historical and cultural relevance, HBCCs have the opportunity to provide a welcoming and nurturing environment similar for four-year HBCUs.

CHAPTER 3

SCHOLARLY REFLECTION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how Black men navigate the transition process to a Historically Black Community College (HBCC). The study was intended to fill a gap in the literature related to the experiences of Black men as they transition to HBCCs because most of the literature focused on Black men's transition to four-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Focusing solely on this phenomenon in HBCUs did not allow for an exploration of the unique experiences of Black men in a community college setting.

My initial interest was in the overall experiences of Black men at community colleges, with a specific focus on their success strategies. Given the research I had completed, it seemed logical to think that the issue involved the supports that Black men receive at school, as these supports are aimed at helping students be successful. It also seemed that Black men would be better equipped for success by attending an HBCC because same-race peers help to support, encourage, and validate their academic success (Harper, 2006b). With this understanding, I decided to narrow the topic down specifically to the transition of Black men to an HBCC and their experiences with one type of support—Freshman Academy (ORI 101)—that was provided to help them be successful.

Research Success and Challenges

To provide insight into the transition process of Black men at one specific HBCC, I conducted a descriptive qualitative case study. The main data source was interviews with 15 participants. I chose interviews because they yield meaningful and rich responses about participants' personalized experience. To help me take on the study in this way, my initial plan was to simply go on campus and conduct the interviews. Because the research site is predominately Black, I assumed that I would be able to easily establish rapport, recruit, and interview Black men face-to-face on campus. I really saw the in-person interaction as a potential strength at the original decision for this research topic. I felt my positionality as mentioned in Chapter 1 would give me an advantage when connecting with Black men on campus; Also, as an ORI 101 instructor, I thought I would have completed that task very quickly (2-3 weeks). However, Covid-19 policies and mandates thwarted my ability to conduct the recruitment and interviews face-to-face. Therefore, I had to call participants directly as the recruitment strategy and conduct and record interviews using Zoom, a video chat service.

The recruitment and interview process took eight weeks. The major challenge I faced was finding Black men who were willing to answer their phone for an unknown caller. Given the amount of spam calls people receive now, I had anticipated I would need to call several more individuals than I needed for my sample size. Another challenge was getting potential participants to remain on the phone with me long enough for me to describe the research or to commit to a 45-minute Zoom interview—then they had to actually attend. Despite the challenges, I was able to recruit 15 participants from 32 cold calls. The challenges I encountered in participant recruitment were mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing

mandates. Considering the unique circumstances, I don't think there is anything else I could have done. If the pandemic hadn't occurred, I would have enjoyed face-to-face interviews more to establish a connection and draw more in-depth information from the one-on-one time. I would thus definitely opt into face-to-face interviews if conducting another research study.

In terms of data collection, what I feel went well was participants' engagement in the interviews. I felt that participants were very open and genuine about their experience. They were also eager and excited about sharing their experiences and hearing about my journey. Additionally, participants shared that they are looking forward to seeing the results. As the pandemic started to decline and students were able to come back to campus, I was able to meet with a few of the participants. They shared that they understood and agreed with the results. The two themes that they were passionate about were HBCC status and support networks. Those are two areas in which they wished they had more opportunities. They expressed feelings of boredom pertaining to the lack of student activities, and they showed a desire for more mentoring relationships with men on campus.

A challenge I faced during the research process was managing work, family, and writing. I came into the dissertation process knowing that it would be very time consuming; however, looking back, I truly did not know what to expect. Previously, I had done well with distance education learning but with the pandemic and the increased use of Zoom and other synchronous online platforms, I started to experience burnout and lacked motivation for 4-5 months. Eventually, I decided to use my background in health and wellness to get me back on track. I began exercising more regularly, eating superfoods, reducing my screen time on my phone in spurts, and decreased my social media usage. I was basically reclaiming energy from

unproductive areas of my daily routine and creating new energy mentally and physically with diet and exercise.

Lastly, I think a challenge that was and always has been for me is the societal pressures and complexities that come with being a Black man teaching in higher education while simultaneously taking graduate courses in higher education. Over the last four years, there have been a multitude of events involving racial, political, and social unrest, so my ability to focus in on this personal academic goal has proved to be extremely difficult. I'm thankful for the support that Northern Illinois University afforded me in the "Letter to Black Students from Black Faculty" during 2020's "ongoing police violence against Black people and the lack of respect, racial sensitivity." I saved that email because it encouraged me to continue to push forward like many of the trailblazers of the Civil Rights Movement. I spent an abundance of my time encouraging myself, but I would advise future Black researchers to find or create a Black academic support group. There are six other Black men whom I personally know who have completed their doctoral journey within the last two years, and we have occasionally encouraged each other in passing or via text. However, I believe that I would've benefited more from a constant interaction with my peers in a type of Black academic brotherhood. While we all have greeted the other and will continue to greet others at the finish line of a doctoral journey, we missed the opportunity to share our experiences with each other during this arduous task.

Personal Learning Experiences

As I reflect on the research process, I realize that I *am* my research. What I mean by this is that I identified with aspects of each research study included in the literature review and each Black man I interviewed. I also realized that by attending a predominantly White institution

(PWI), I was fortunate to have sought out the Black experience through my own student engagement as an undergraduate. Most notably, as a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated, one of “The Divine Nine” Black Greek letter organizations on colleges and universities internationally, I realized that its fundamental purpose of “achievement in every field of human endeavor” pushed me far beyond anything imaginable when I joined at 19 years old.

I also learned that even after attending six different colleges (three with conditional acceptance), having received a Bachelor of Science in fitness leadership, a master’s in health studies, several graduate hours, and now completing this doctoral degree like my participants, I am still trying to navigate my own way and figure out how to best help myself and other Black men. I am intrigued by the data on Black men in higher education because retrospectively I see that the challenges I faced are common among Black men enrolled in college.

Another thing I learned is that I find comfort in isolation when working with a challenging task, but I am learning to step outside of my comfort zone in order to grow personally and professionally. My father always told me as a child, “Son, you’re going to have to be twice as good, and twice as smart. . .,” I still live by those words. As such, I have felt a need to push myself continuously with the hope and intention of making a difference in the lives of Black men in higher education.

I have learned that while my profession is an academic administrator, my passion is competition and my purpose is helping others through systematic influence and change. If you had asked me for advice on study habits 20 years ago, I would have said, “Learn as much as you can as fast as you can.” Twenty years later, this dissertation process has shown me to learn as

effectively as you can at various productive paces. I have effectively acquired the art of trusting the process of research and trusting myself and those who support me to help get me through.

Finally, I learned from mostly my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Gudrun Nyunt, along with my committee members, Dr. Xiaodon Hu and Dr. Lonnie Hannon III, that I belong and that I made the right decision with my research choice. They were very supportive, inspirational, and direct along the way. The greatest takeaway I learned is that as an academic, always know the intentions of the study, ask the right questions, and focus the body of work on those questions to reveal the beauty of the research.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study are especially relevant to the work that I do on the Complete College America/Predominantly Black Community College (CCA/PBCC) Committee at my institution. A central goal of the committee is to identify, maintain, and promote culturally relevant learning opportunities and supports that keep students on track and guide them to program completion. The results of my research fit within the committee's goals by revealing Black men's experiences in transitioning and ultimately succeeding at HBCCs, focusing on challenges they encountered along the way as well as supports that were important to them.

My personal learning during the research process relates to my professional practice, as the process has helped me to realize that perception is reality to students in higher education. While the pandemic has caused many community colleges to panic about low enrollment numbers, some have embraced the chaos as an opportunity to hear the voices and concerns of the students they serve. Institutions, administrators, faculty, and other stakeholders will benefit by

evolving and adapting to the needs of the students and the movement of society. This is a message that I will carry with me for the remainder of my career.

My educational journey has changed the way I perceive the world of higher education. As a faculty member, I will now be more open minded about the strategies I use to engage students. As a department chair, I will look for ways to motivate my faculty to also adopt new and productive strategies in the classroom to promote student success. I think it is important to note that as Black men are facing more challenges than other races at community colleges, programs that benefit them can also benefit all students. I say this in hope that existing programs or institutional initiatives for Black men will be able to translate to other minority groups, if not all student groups as needed. As a member of the CCA/PBCC committee on campus, I plan to share my research with my team members to contribute to this taskforce. Specifically, I plan to explore the possibilities of creating a transition, networking, and retention program for Black men at my institution. With the combination of my personal and professional college experience as a Black man, my exposure and volunteer work with local mentoring programs in the K-12 system, and volunteering with Black men retention programs at a local university, I believe this research will allow for an applicable and effective program model for Black men at community colleges. Although one of my major findings was the lack of inclusion of the HBCC status into ORI 101, I haven't determined if there will be an opportunity to revise the curriculum. This is the first year a PBCC initiative has been undertaken at TSCC, so I'm interested to see how campus leaders will support the planning and implementations from the group. I am hopeful that my research will play an influential role in helping steer some of the recommendations from the committee.

Applications to Research

I chose to follow the format of a peer-reviewed journal that focuses on orientation, transition, and retention experiences. I felt that this journal fit well with my research because one of its central topics is transitioning to higher education. To align with the journal's formatting requirements, I reviewed the guidelines included on their website and several recently published articles. I learned that each phase of research will change and evolve. I have also learned that research questions must be precisely clear to keep the researcher on track to an actual result/recommendation that has the power to solve a problem or impact the specific area of research. So, constantly ask why and how, and ask it again.

This was my first experience writing a research article, and I approached it with an open mind. I knew I had to conduct research on a topic that I was passionate about to stay engaged. I think in order for me to enhance the trajectory of my career in higher education I need to publish an article and possibly more—two of my mentors have published several articles. I'd be interested in talking with them more about their writing schedule and how they approach getting published regularly.

Conclusion

This research provided insights into the Orientation 101's influence on Black men as they transitioned to an HBCC and adds to the emerging research on Black men in community college by focusing on the unique context of an HBCC. This research also contributes to the knowledge needed to help faculty, administrators, student affairs professionals, and policymakers regarding the experience of Black men in community college, in general, and HBCCs, in particular.

Enhanced understanding of experiences of Black men at an HBCC can lead to improved policies, programs, and practices that can enhance retention among Black men in all community colleges.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a voluntary research study about your experience as a Black man transitioning to a Historically Black Community College. I am conducting this study for my doctoral dissertation at Northern Illinois University. The purpose of the study is to explore how Black men are navigating the transition process to a Historically Black Community College.

By choosing to participate, you will complete one interview using Zoom or a face-to-face interview for 45 minutes. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. All findings from the study, including excerpts from the interview, will be published in my dissertation. Your identity will be kept confidential and your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate in this study or not, your student status at Lawson State Community College will not be impacted in any way. Also, you can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.

If you are interested in participating in this study and sharing your experiences about your transition to LSCC, please complete the attached questionnaire and return it to Z1855250@students.niu.edu by (insert date).

Thank you for your consideration, and if you have any questions, feel free to contact me. This is an Institutional Review Board approved project.

Eric Agee
Northern Illinois University
205-240-6385

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

LSCC email:

Phone:

What semester did you take ORI 101?

Was your ORI 101 a Mini 1 or Mini 2 term course?

Was your ORI 101 in person, virtual, or online?

Enrollment status:

full-time (12 credit hours or more) part-time (up to 11 credit hours)

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction:

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to this interview today. This study focuses on the transition process of Black men into a Historically Black Community College. Hearing about your experience with transitioning to Toussaint State Community College (TSCC) will significantly contribute to this study. This is a reminder that this is not a test, and I would like to hear your true perspective on how your navigation process went.

Your information will be kept confidential, so please be comfortable and provide as much detail as possible. You have the right to withdraw your participation in this interview at any time. You previously signed a consent form authorizing your participation in this interview. Do you have any questions about the consent process? This conversation will be recorded once we begin questions. This will help me review and summarize your interview. Are you ready to begin?

Interview Questions

Questions related to Approaching Transitions:

- What influenced your decision to go to college? How did you decide on a community college?
 - How did you decide on an HBCC?
- How did you prepare for college? Who supported you in preparing for college?
 - *Follow up:* Are you a first-generation college student?
 - *If yes,* how do you think being a first-generation student has impacted your transition to college?
- How did you decide on a major?

Questions related to Situation:

- How would you describe your overall transition to TSCC?
- Are you satisfied or unsatisfied with the new student orientation process of TSCC? Why or why not?
- How has ORI 101 (Freshman Academy) influenced your transition, positively or negatively?
- Can you describe the type of campus culture you have experienced at TSCC?
 - Do you think that TSCC being a Historically Black Community College shapes this campus culture? If so, how?

Questions related to Self:

- How, if at all, have demographic characteristics impacted this transition (for example, race/ethnicity, first-generation student status, socio-economic status)?
- What personal characteristics have helped you manage this transition (for example, you may be a very determined person and being determined has helped you manage your multiple responsibilities)?
- How, if at all, has spirituality impacted your transition to TSCC?

Questions related to Strategies:

- What have you done to successfully navigate this transition?
- How did you develop these strategies?
- What strategies have or have not worked?
- How, if at all, does ORI 101 relate to the strategies you utilized?
 - What, if any, specific strategies did you gain from taking ORI 101?

- Can you discuss each strategy and how you apply it to your transition?
- What other strategies would have been beneficial?

Questions related to Support:

- Who has supported you through this transition?
- What have these individuals done that has been helpful in managing this transition?
- How, if at all, have ORI 101 and the FAME instructors supported you?
- What additional support do you wish you would have had whether from individuals in your life, the faculty, or the institution?
- How have the resources at TSCC encouraged or discouraged you?

Closing

- Is there anything else related to your transition, that we have not covered that we have not covered that you would like for me to know?
- What questions do you have for me?

APPENDIX D

PHONE SCRIPT

Phone Script:

Hello, this is Coach Agee from Toussaint State Community College. I'm conducting research on the transition of Black men to an HBCC, and I see that you've taken ORI 101. I'd like the opportunity to interview you on zoom for 45 mins to hear about your experience in the course. Your contribution will help my research and possible other research related to Black men at community colleges. This interview is completely voluntary and it will not affect your student status. What's a good time for us to conduct this interview?