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## **Black Male Sense of Belonging at Predominantly White Institutions**

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## ABSTRACT

### BLACK MALE SENSE OF BELONGING AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

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Northern Illinois University, 2023  
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The objective of this dissertation is to identify the sense of belonging of Black male students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs). In many cases, Black males feel they do not belong in collegiate environments in the United States. Thirty-nine Black males attending a mid-sized Midwestern university were surveyed using the Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustrations Survey and the College Persistence Questionnaire. One interesting result was a significant correlation between social integration and relatedness satisfaction, indicating Black males feel like they belong in the collegiate environment when they are integrated socially with students and faculty who look like them. This led to the utilization of a practical intervention to engage Black males and create a sense of belonging in PWIs. This intervention is called the Barbershop Talks Experience (BTE). The BTE is a working platform engaging participants while attempting to create a sense of belonging for them on campus and encourage supportive relationships among participants. These goals all fit in the self-determination theory framework, as they help satisfy the need for relatedness among the participants. The mission of the BTE is to encourage Black males to authentically exist in all spaces, by exposing current ideologies and educating with formal intent but delivered in an informal way.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

DEKALB, ILLINOIS

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BLACK MALE SENSE OF BELONGING AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

BY

CHRISTOPHER MITCHELL

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IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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Stephen M. Tonks

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the following six people who keep me going and will always love and appreciate me.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

As a Black male striving for academic success in a cultural environment in which I never felt I belonged, I believe one of my purposes in life is to be a role model and to provide a safe space for Black males in White spaces where they have little to no sense of belonging. Research shows that a sense of belonging cultivates college academic success. Strayhorn (2012) writes that “without a sense of belonging, there can be no educational success for Black men in college” (p. 86). Akbar (1991) and Cuyjet (2006) found that Black men are searching for role models and contend that not finding any can lead to their involvement in unhealthy relationships, particularly for Black males attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Researchers Gaston and Ojewuyi (2022) defines PWIs as universities that have 50% or more enrollment of White students or any University that is considered historically indoctrinated in white cultural norms. It is advantageous to create a sense of community to engage and immerse Black men in a feeling that they belong at the institution (Strayhorn, 2012). A sense of belonging for Black males is reflected by their connection to their environment, communication with other Black males, and the ability to create spaces of comfort and inclusion for their marginalized group (Brooms, 2019).

## Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation explores the sense of belonging for Black males who attend PWIs. This chapter provides an overview of the dissertation, the intended audience, and the professional setting. Chapter 2 is a review of existing research addressing Black males' historical engagement in higher education as well as a historical perspective and description of the current Black male collegiate experience. It also provides an analysis of the importance of role modeling and Black males' sense of belonging at PWIs. Chapter 3 presents the results of a study on relatedness as seen by Black male students at a PWI. In that study, I use a correlational research design to investigate the participants' identified needs. Chapter 4 describes an intervention model for practitioners reinforcing Black male engagement at PWIs called the Barbershop Talk Experience (BTE) as an example of a practical intervention to increase Black males' sense of belonging.

### Intended Audience

The intended target audience includes researchers in the fields of educational and developmental psychology as well as adult and higher education faculty, administrators, and Black male students. The research intersects administrators with Black male students who recognize the need to cultivate a sense of belonging. The area of educational psychology is saturated with research on belongingness theory, but limited research exists on Black males and their basic psychological need of relatedness in collegiate spaces, specifically at PWIs.

### My Professional Setting

I have overcome many obstacles in my life, particularly regarding my education. When I was a high school student, my teachers told me that I would not graduate. Some students would

have been crippled by this, but I used that discouragement as motivation to not only graduate from high school but to become the first in my family to obtain a bachelor's and a master's degree. I am passionate about my education because it has changed my life and the lives of the people who are closest to me. Therefore, I am pursuing my doctoral degree in educational psychology.

I attended Northern Illinois University (NIU) for both my bachelor's degree in corporate communications, which helped me understand the importance of a liberal education, and my master's degree in adult and higher education, which helped me discover my passion for the field of education. I then felt ready to complete my doctorate. Higher education helped me to evolve from a kid who hated school into a collegiate academic counselor who helps students navigate the complexities of university life. I am passionate not just about my education in particular, I am also passionate about education in general. Most importantly, I know I need it to fulfill my purpose on earth. Education energizes me to inspire other Black males and underrepresented populations who have had similar academic struggles.

My area of emphasis in educational psychology is sense of belonging. My goal is to become the director of a cultural center or program that supports minority students so I can assist PWIs with recruitment and retention of underrepresented student populations. I have organized and facilitated programs, roundtable discussions, and forums in the NIU community to encourage Black and Latino male students to share some of the fears and expectations they have at this particular PWI. Multiple programs were designed to raise participants' awareness of different cultures as well as to give them the tools they need to be retained, create stronger networks with faculty and staff, and motivate them to always strive to achieve their best. While attending NIU, I took part in mentorship programs to support Black males' development, which I

believe should be addressed by higher education institutions. Miller (2020) writes that the number of Black males enrolled in college is declining, and this decline is related to their feeling like they do not belong in the collegiate environment. My goal is to become a prominent and respected administrator by becoming the director of an underrepresented program but still leaving options open to eventually become tenured faculty. I intend to help schools with retention and graduation by producing programs and helping faculty and staff become student-centered and driven to see all students succeed.

I want to be an agent of change and motivation in the NIU community to nurture students and inspire them to pursue their goals and obtain graduate degrees. I strongly agree with Chandler (2008) who says that establishing programs and activities will allow Black males to understand that educators and institutions care about their enrollment, graduation and overall success.

I want to gain research experience as well as the credentials to change policies and spearhead different initiatives. I also want to apply my skills toward increasing the graduation rate of minorities and inspiring future educators in my field. My goal is to motivate students to recognize their true potential. I want to motivate teachers at the college level to teach the best way they can by engaging everyone in their classes. Students need help establishing autonomy within academic settings while they come into their own educational and social identity. I want to motivate others to believe in themselves regardless of their situations. I want to take advantage of my educational opportunities and be an inspiration to my family and the world.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been an increase in Black males attending PWIs over the past 60 years. In 2013, Reid found that more Black males were enrolled in PWIs than in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) due to policy changes and resources made available to Black males. Jone-Fosu et al. (2019) noted that the trend continued as data from the top 50 institutions that produce education degrees show 36% more Black males attended PWIs than HBCUs.

This chapter highlights some of the historical factors that have impacted Black males and their sense of belonging at PWIs. This chapter also illustrates some of the theoretical perspectives that shape identity, the complexities of race, and self-determination theory as well as how role modeling can reshape the future perspective of Black males' sense of belonging to counteract the negative impacts of history.

#### Historical Influences on Black Males' Sense of Belonging

The history of Black males' existence on U.S. soil has been one filled with fighting and resilience. In this historical section, I discuss several experiences that contribute to the history of the education of Black males.

#### Slavery

Because sense of belonging is rooted in a sociocultural context, understanding the history of Black males in the United States can shed light on Black males' sense of belonging today.

Indeed, it is not difficult to see how experiences of Black males likely shaped their sense of belonging in White institutions in negative ways. Throughout U.S. history, from 1619 when the first documented African was forcefully brought to America as a slave, Africans were stripped of their culture and their methods of education upon arrival to America. According to Hannah-Jones and Watson (2019), enslaved Africans were forced to assimilate into the Americanized constructs of capitalism and slavery. Hannah-Jones and Watson (2019) also contend that education in America for Blacks began in captivity under the restrictions of White slave masters, plantations, and mistresses of the White families and their children, and thus education for Black Americans has been rooted in servitude to White people. Education has been an avenue for control and power, as was true in the times of slavery when education for Blacks was severely prohibited by their slave masters. Slaves were punished, beaten, and/or killed if it was known that they knew how to read or write.

Brown and Fultz (2008) referenced the apprehension of educating Black men, which stemmed from a fear of Black men being fed up with their conditions, realizing their power and their strength, and then rebelling, all because they were educated. Brown and Fultz (2008) described Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner who were educated slaves and preached Christianity to other slaves. In preaching the Gospel, they found liberation in making themselves and fellow laborers free by rebelling against their oppressor, which was a consistent fear during times of slavery. Hackney (2005) contends this is evident in the writings of Frederick Douglass, a former slave who learned how to read and write from his master's wife. Whites feared that the education of Black males would encourage independence and free-thinking and would allow Black people the opportunity to compete with Whites and, as Darling-Hammond (1998) notes, unequal opportunities kept Whites in power.

### Jim Crow Laws

Jim Crow laws can be seen as another powerful factor affecting Black males' sense of belonging. Jim Crow was a minstrel character in the early 1820s who Woodward (1964) says was represented by Black face and negative stereotypical ideas about Blacks being uneducated, lazy, and criminalistic. According to Woodward (1964), Jim Crow laws were instituted by racist men in power who created structures of oppression in which Blacks were unwelcome in White spaces. Blacks entering White-owned restaurants, hotels, neighborhoods, schools, and/or stores often resulted in Blacks being denied services, beaten, jailed, or murdered for being Black in a White space. The idea of "separate but equal" post-Civil War reconstructed inequalities within America and created inferior accommodations and treatment for Blacks in areas like housing communities, schools, churches, restaurants, public parks, sidewalks, and water fountains.

### *Plessy v. Ferguson*

As a result of Jim Crow laws, transportation, and freedom to use transportation became an issue in rail cars in the 1896 *Plessy vs Ferguson* case. Duignan (n.d.) documented Homer Plessy a one-eighth Black man traveling in Louisiana who purchased a train ticket in a car reserved for White passengers. Plessy refused to move and was arrested for violating Louisiana's separate car act. The *Plessy vs Ferguson* Act allowed segregation laws to be established by states and local governments.

### *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*

The separate but equal laws lasted until 1954 with school integration becoming the foundation of integration with the *Brown vs the Board of Education of Topeka*. Blacks were

finally integrated into the White schools but, according to Menand (2001), integration came with its own systemic traumas, which continue to be prevalent today.

The history of Black males in the U.S. and Black males in higher education are two separate conversations that shape the narratives of everything Black males experience in America, and their educational experiences shape the trajectory of their future. Philosopher Daniel Kahneman (2010) contends experience and memory shape who we are. Kahneman believes we function with two ideas of self. The first idea of self is the experiencing self that lives and knows the present situations and circumstances. The second idea of self keeps a record of who we are and maintains that narrative, similar to a subconsciousness of identity. This concept connects to Black males' educational experiences due to the obstruction and hindrances that have historically been set before Black males. Since the first African slave arrived in 1619, Black people have fought an endless battle for equality and access in every lane that would consider them human: the right to breathe, the right to live, the right to belong. Systemic racist ideologies tell Black males they have no rights. The historical components of slavery, Jim Crow laws, *Plessy vs Fergusson*, *Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka*, and desegregation have triggered discussions about key inhibitors to Black males' sense of belonging in higher education.

### Sociocultural Issues

The reality of Black males' low sense of belonging in education has been shown through the stories of Black men who have lived in America since 1619. How can Black males belong to a system that was never designed for them to succeed? The answer should be simple, but it is not. Tatum (2015) writes that Black male students are the most scrutinized in society, and, as a

result, the scrutiny and deficit perspective Black males are often viewed through shape their sense of belonging in a negative way, implying they are not smart enough and do not belong in the academic environment. Tatum highlighted Fredrick Douglas who was denied learning how to read from his slave master, to show how the educational system in which Black males have been forced to assimilate is historically life-threatening and unwelcoming. Tatum (2015) described the academic disparities and deficiencies within Black males' reading and comprehension, their desire to read, and the academic deficits that impact them. Jagers and Iverson (2012) identified that Black males have increased the preconceived negative assumptions and stereotypes at every academic level based on their actions. Harper's (2014) research exposed the deficit approaches that plague today's Black males in education, leading to a lack of engagement and systemically racist ideals that influence Black males' disconnection with education and their lack of sense of belonging.

There are many sociocultural issues that affect Black males before they arrive at college and continue to affect them while they are enrolled. Some of them grow up in poverty-stricken neighborhoods or are exposed to childhood trauma. Brooks-Gunn et al. (2000) showed that "impoverished African American neighborhoods have fewer institutional and social resources than more affluent neighborhoods" (p.62). This statement includes the limited resources that assist students in learning as well as the limited resources and or programs that keep students out of trouble. Poverty-stricken neighborhoods do not have the necessary role models needed to help the youth succeed in their disenfranchised environments.

Impoverished neighborhoods with more unemployed adults and single-parent households provide role models that eschew conventional emphases on school achievement, work skills, family organization, future orientations, and self-efficacy. In contrast, affluent neighborhoods with more working adults and two-parent families provide stronger normative support and conventional role models

for school achievement, work skills, family patterns, future orientations, and self-efficacy. (p. 62)

Anthony et al. (2007) and Harper (2012) address the low expectations educators have of their Black male students. Fisher's (2015) study also highlights some of the barrier's Black males from pre-K to 12<sup>th</sup> grade confront:

These young men are not only educated by teachers who often engage in culturally incongruent pedagogy, they are also pupils of educators who are ill-equipped to meet their educational needs, independent of their unique social position. Additionally, Black boys are often met with alarmingly low expectations from educators. (pp. 12-13)

Fisher's study suggests that White teachers in urban areas lack the cultural competency to teach Black males, and that Black teachers who may be culturally competent lack the required credentials to teach Black males compared to White students in suburban areas. Although this is not true in all cases, Fisher's study sheds light on the disparities between cultural competency and the educational needs of Black male students. Anthony et al. (2007) found that:

American males, more severely than females, and in the face of harsher economic and social realities, confront their families with the added challenge of socializing boys in ways that reduce vulnerabilities to school failure and various forms of self-destructive behavior. From infancy into adulthood males are socialized to be aggressive, dominant, competitive, and assertive. (p. 5)

This is evidence that the environments Black males are raised in have a significant influence on their perceptions of self and actions. Kafele (2009) says, "Many young Black males also have to endure the pressure to join gangs; some even end up joining gangs simply to remain safe and keep the gangs off their backs" (p. 16). The sociocultural factors affect the psychological factors. Fisher (2015) studied the issue of racial inferiority that has invaded the mindsets of PreK-12 administrators and the trajectories of Black males within the educational system. This stigma greatly affects the psychological well-being of Black males, especially

those involved in special education programs. Fisher (2015) says, “Black males are disproportionately represented among students classified with learning disabilities moreover, the number of black boys in special education programs has a positive correlation with the number of white teachers in a school” (p.14). Fisher also found that the more White educators there are in an institution, the more the teachers are going to consider Black males as being incapable of functioning in a traditional classroom environment. This mirrors Harper’s (2015) research concerning deficit models in education affecting Black males.

### Sense of Belonging

Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs defines belongingness as an emotional need for relationships, group affiliation, and connectedness. From a 20<sup>th</sup>- century lens, Strayhorn (2012) applies and expands Maslow’s (1943) idea of belongingness to Black males in White spaces and divides this concept of belonging into three different categories: 1) belongingness as a concept, 2) circumstances that cause or give rise to belonging, and 3) the relationship between belonging and other outcomes or behaviors. Maslow’s (1943) motivational hierarchy of needs points out the need for belonging in the center of his triangular diagram, contending that sense of belonging fosters balance among the other needs in the hierarchy. After physiological and safety needs have been fulfilled, the third level of human needs is social and involves feelings of belongingness. This stage within the hierarchy of needs provides a space or community for all the other needs to be fulfilled and function. There is a distinct pathway from Maslow’s (1943) idea of belonging to today’s concept of sense of belonging. The ideas of belonging are all centered upon connection and relationships, which fulfill the need to belong. In the growing acknowledgement of self and belonging. Schacter (1959) wrote about the importance of human

interactions and Goodenow (1993) believed people need to belong in places where they spend much of their time, which is certainly relevant for students.

Human interactions where time is spent is important and helps create a sense of belonging, Baumeister and Leary (1995) based their research on Maslow's model and expounded on the theoretical perspective in which belongingness has two functionalities. Baumeister and Leary's (1995) approach is the most relevant foundational explanation for sense of belonging within this study. In this study, good communication and authentic building of bonds guide the literature and practice. Baumeister and Leary (1995) say first, people need consistent and constant communication that is free of negativity and conflict. Second, people need to identify the communal and relational bond through lenses of balance, authenticity, healthy relationship, and the longevity of the relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As an example of sense of belonging based on Baumeister and Leary's (1995) interpretation, Brooms and Davis (2017) write that when Black males are in healthy relationships with their peers and role model figures, they are able to thrive and succeed.

Affiliation and connectedness are necessary for belonging, and Mcleod (2020) indicates belongingness refers to humans' emotional need for interpersonal relationships, affiliation, connectedness, and feeling they are part of a group. Some examples of belongingness needs include friendship, intimacy, trust, and acceptance, receiving and giving affection.

Belongingness and relatedness in this research context represent each other. Deci and Ryan (2002) use the term relatedness to refer to belongingness and define it as a sense of mattering to others or a sense of belonging to a group. I will dive further into Deci and Ryan's research in the theoretical section of this paper.



### Black Males' Sense of Belonging

Hanson (2021) found that 66% of Black students enrolled in college are women and 33% are Black males; however, the likelihood of Black males dropping out of four-year institutions is high. Bridges (2023) writes, “Black men have the lowest completion rate at 40%.” Bridges (2023) also addresses some of the causes of this issue like independence, work life balance, working a job, family responsibilities, and finances. Black male sociocultural experiences in education have not been equitable due to the number of Black males with individual educational programs (IEPs) 504 plans and overdiagnosis of which Harper (2012) speaks. Allen et al. (2004) found that “educational achievement is a social process, shaped by human exchanges within definitive sociocultural contexts” (p. 96). According to Harper (2012), Black males are taught from a deficit model approach, although “most people believed lower-performing Black male students had the same potential but had not encountered people or culturally relevant experiences that motivated them to be engaged, strive for academic success, and persist through baccalaureate degree attainment” (pp. 9-10). Brooms and Davis (2017) interviewed several Black males who indicated they were not prepared for college in high school, and their only bridge to college was programs like Upward Bound that provide extensive support.

Although sense of belonging is important to all students in higher education, Hurtado and Carter (1997) wrote that college students’ behaviors, affect, and cognition are related to their sense of belonging, which is especially true for Black male students attending PWIs. Black males at PWIs face the unique situation of having to create their own sense of belonging rather than automatically feeling they belong, as experienced by other populations, as noted by Strayhorn (2012). It is critical to understand Black males’ sense of belonging to increase their retention and graduation. According to Strayhorn (2012) and Brooms and Davis (2017), increasing retention

for Black males involves socially and academically engaging with one another to cultivate relationships and become involved in the social and academic spaces. This parallels Tinto's (1975) finding that colleges and universities can increase retention when students are integrated into their environments from social and academic perspectives. But, according to Harper (2006a), research has also shown that Black males do not integrate into the social and academic environments well at PWIs due to the lack of their representation in the classrooms and residence halls, particularly in White rural and suburban environments in which the schools are located.

### Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) is described by Deci and Ryan (2000) as a theory of motivation based on humans' three basic psychological needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. The fulfillment of these three needs cultivates social development. Deci and Ryan (2017) contend that when one or more of the psychological needs are neglected, the individual will display a cognitive and psychological diminishment of their well-being. Each of the needs identified by Deci and Ryan (2017) are important to human functionality, and focusing on the needs provides information about the differences that shape decisions.

Deci and Ryan (2004) define relatedness as a sense of mattering to others or a sense of belonging to a group. Olswang and Taylor (1997) contend Black males will have better inclusive experiences and will maintain higher academic standards by providing environments for social involvement and academic enrichment. Relatedness provides support and community for Black males. Relatedness can minimize isolation and invisibility and help create connections with others. Exner et al. (2013) found that "Black male college students report experiencing

condescension, isolation, invisibility, and super-visibility. They also report pervasive feelings of discomfort, frustration, and exhaustion” (p. 5).

Deci and Ryan (2004) define competence as a human’s need to interact in their environment by producing desirable outcomes and preventing undesirable outcomes. Competence provides the energy for the process of learning and is essential to providing ownership of the activities and actions in which people succeed. Black males’ feelings of competence are important and can create desirable outcomes when supportive relationships with faculty and staff exist (Astin, 1993).

Deci and Ryan (2002) define autonomy as “the perceived origin or source of one’s own behavior” (p. 8). Deci and Ryan (2004) argue that autonomy involves an individual’s integration of experiences, vitality, and wholeness in functioning without control from others. Autonomy allows resources and free-flowing interests and abilities, and Broome and Davis’s (2017) research suggests Black males’ autonomy to connect to their own culture and individual identities increases their persistence.

Black males who attend PWIs typically face disparities within the representation of students and faculty who look like them. Harper and Quayle (2009) address a few of the issues that impact Black males while enrolled in PWIs. Racial identity development is one, but Harper and Quayle’s findings support the need for relatedness and identified five areas of impact: “1) racial identity development, 2) being one of few racial/ethnic minority students, 3) lack of same race/ethnicity faculty, 4) curricular content, 5) culturally responsive pedagogy” (p. 159). Three of the five involve the need for relatedness. Relatedness is belonging, and belonging assists Black males in cultivating their identity development in a group of peers and professionals that look like them. Students having a sense of belonging is necessary.

### Modern Theories and Black Males' Sense of Belonging

Identity is important to creating a sense of belonging for Black males. If Black males understand who they are, then their sense of belonging to a group of Black males in a White environment can be fulfilled without questioning their existence. According to Evans et al. (2010), "Racial identity theories focus on the role of race and the extent to which it is incorporated into identity or self-concept" (p. 254), suggesting that racial identity helps Black males be aware of themselves with regard to race and identity. Self-concept, according to Baumeister (1999), is "the individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is." Self-concept cultivates the need to belong with those who share similar identities and self-concepts.

### Cross's Theory of Psychological Nigrescence

In this section, I explore Cross's theory of psychological nigrescence and critical race theory and their connection to self-determination theory concerning Black males' retention at PWIs. Evans et al. (2010) refer to the most recognized theory when it comes to Black identity development: Cross's theory of psychological nigrescence. Nigrescence is the "process of becoming Black" (p. 256). The idea of "becoming" involves awareness of self and coming into identity; the necessities required to learn what it means to be Black are developed within this theory. I like to look at it as "Black awareness." The Cross-model theory comes from the perspective of African Americans' lifespan and how they develop their identity over the course of their life. This theory explains the development of cultural awareness that Blacks discover about themselves within their culture. According to Cross's model, three essential components drive this theory, and six sections connect all three essential components. The

three components are nigrescence pattern A (personal identity), nigrescence pattern B (reference group orientation), and nigrescence pattern C (nigrescence recycling) (Evans et al., 2010). Pattern A, developing Black identity, is based on experiences inside and outside the culture; for example, verbal communication within the household and neighborhood using certain dialogue and language that connects to the upbringing within the culture. Pattern B stems from the positive and negative experiences that change during their adulthood stage. An example of pattern B is being followed in a convenience store by another race or having a positive interaction with a law enforcement officer. Pattern C deals with nigrescence recycling, “a process that involves an expansion or modification of Black identity throughout adulthood” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 256). An example of pattern C is attending a cultural museum that causes further enlightenment on the culture.

Personal identity development is cultivated throughout the process of this theory. The idea of becoming connects all stages of Cross’s theory. Personal identity is constructed and includes traits and characteristics that make up an individual’s personality. Within this theory, reference group orientation reveals how someone perceives everything based on their experiences. Race salience is the importance of race in everyday living and how it translates from experiences.

Cross’s theory has six sectors that apply to identity development. Sector one, infancy and childhood in early Black identity development, is a beginning stage in which Black children have no connection to racial identity or racism. Their experiences are limited to their relationships at home, school, and church. Sector two, preadolescence, deals with the teaching of children by their parents or guardians as well as how Black identity development is being cultivated outside of their homes. Sector three, adolescence, is the stage in which Black

children have accepted their identity without reflecting on why they are Black, and at which point they have some understanding and awareness of a Black self (Evans et al., 2010). Sector four, early adulthood, is where low race salience, high race salience, and internalized racism are all revisited. In this section, early adults are normally put in a place in which they must evaluate who they are and must examine themselves and their race. Sector five, adult nigrescence, is the process of becoming Black as an adult and involves four stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization/internalization commitment. In sector six, “nigrescence recycling occurs when an individual’s preexisting Black self-concept is called into question” (p. 260). This sector allows Black participants to reach a place of wisdom in which they can understand Black identity and, as a result, help someone else understand.

The different sectors in this identity theory are designed to provide awareness of self to African Americans and the position they hold within their own cultural identity. This identity theory can help Black males develop awareness of their identity. According to Burge et al. (2004), identity can affect the ability or desire to learn. Identity development can lead to a sense of belonging in Black males, and when it comes to retention, they will apply themselves more as well as realize that they have the support and community to reinforce success.

### Critical Race Theory

Historically, the power within the construct of race is one of the most influential factors within education. According to Bécares and Priest (2015),

The US racial/ethnic academic achievement gap is a well-documented social inequality. National assessments for science, mathematics, and reading show that

White students score higher on average than all other racial/ethnic groups, particularly when compared to Black and Hispanic students. Explanations for these gaps tend to focus on the influence of socioeconomic resources, neighborhood and school characteristics, and family composition in patterning socioeconomic inequalities, and on the racialized nature of socioeconomic inequalities as key drivers of racial/ethnic academic achievement gaps. (p.1)

Critical race theory (CRT) shines a light on the disparities in resources and unfair treatment of Black males. Lynn (2002) explains that CRT is a body of legal scholarship that exposes racism in law and in society and describes the impact CRT has on race and racism in education. The exposure of racial injustices through the lens of CRT challenges the constructs or power and policy that have controlled marginalized communities, specifically Black males as it applies to this study. CRT shows the systemic oppression that has further destroyed the sense of belonging that Black males' need to thrive in predominantly White education spaces. The disparities in race and power concerning Blacks and Whites are shaped due to the resources provided to Whites and the lack of resources provided to Blacks. Resources are a representation of power and the main ingredient for power within education. If sources of power in education are actual educational resources, it is proven when we compare test scores from K-12 urban school districts to suburban school districts, and we compare abundant resources to no resources at all.

Ladson-Billing (1998) contends that the idea and perspective of race are complex and considers how "we continue to employ and deploy it" (p. 9). She argues that conceptions of race, even in a postmodern and/or postcolonial world, are more embedded and fixed than the previous ages. She mentions categories like conceptual blackness and conceptual whiteness and talks about the normative positives for conceptual whiteness, which are deemed as positive, and addresses "the marginalized and de-legitimated categories of blackness" (p. 9),

which are deemed as negative. Race is important, and it shapes experiences sociologically and psychologically within the sector of education.

CRT takes the idea of race and shows the disparities of power between White and Black and analyzes the inequalities by acknowledging the stereotypes and elephants in the room that have been avoided. CRT explores legal issues and law enforcement, education, employment, healthcare, homeownership, and entrepreneurship; forces the hard conversations about racial inequality; and causes everyone to pay attention to race through exposure of the racial differences. Darling-Hammond (1998) highlights that race is a key factor of power in everything, and Delgado and Stefancic (2000) contend that

because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture. Formal equal opportunity—rules and laws that insist on treating blacks and Whites (for example) alike can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day. (p. xvi)

CRT prompts hard conversations and causes identity-related to race to be analyzed.

### Role Modeling to Change Historical Impacts

Although Black males have access to postsecondary education, that does not ensure they will be successful. The environment must be conducive to their success. Cuerton (2003) writes:

The arrival of African American students on college campus does not guarantee that they will successfully complete the requirements for a college degree because a significant proportion of college-bound Blacks arrive on campus suffering from consequences of prior affiliations, associations and interactions with adverse social-situational circumstances that have left burdening emotional scars. (Hamilton, 1997 as cited in Cuerton 2003, p. 296)

This simply implies that Black males arrive at PWIs with their guard up, hindering them from feeling connected due to the lack of affiliations and connections that reinforce their success.

Black males at PWIs must leave their affiliations and change their social interactions to establish



a connection with their White peers and White faculty. This is a difficult task if Black males in these White spaces do not have connections with students, faculty, and/or staff who look like them.

Authentic engagement with other Black males within a role modeling or mentor/mentee professional context can shift Black males' experiences in college and increase belonging. Harper (2012) and Broome and Davis (2017) found that Black males need to see themselves in the classroom, which will increase success and their sense of belonging. Black males seeing themselves as faculty and staff can increase their engagement and relatability to the academic space. According to Deci and Ryan (2017), secure social bonds that satisfy the need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are required to establish self-determination. Based on Harper (2012), Broome and Davis (2017), and Deci and Ryan (2017), these secure social bonds can be established through the act of role modeling when Black males identify Black male role models who are in elevated positions of leadership and power and have the capacity to mentor.

Akbar (1991) found Black males are searching for role models, mentors, teachers, big brothers, and father figures and not finding them influences their involvement in gangs and relationships that are not beneficial to their success. Black males need mentors and role models in the spaces in which they learn. According to Hansman (2001), an important quality of mentors is their ability to aid in both psychosocial and career support of their mentees. The most important aspect of mentorship is the career and social support provided to mentees. Mentoring helps Black males become acquainted with the campus climate and provides access to resources as well as academic and social support. Mentoring helps students assimilate into the cultural climate of the institution as well as provides comfort and a guide, helping to eliminate feelings of disconnect.

Mentoring programs for Black males enrolled in college are viewed as supportive relationships that raise awareness of power in education and the historical impact of advancement for Black people. When mentoring programs are in place for Black male students, the opportunities to gain understanding of their potential for success are prevalent. When Black male students participate in mentoring programs, they develop a better sense of the impact their academic success has on society and education (Harper & Davis, 2012; Harris & Wood, 2015; Jagers & Iverson, 2012).

Rodgers and Summers (2008) suggested that qualitative research should address the experiences of Black students at PWIs in four different areas: 1) students' motivation to attend college, 2) students' perceptions of the academic environment, (3) students' social and academic integration, and 4) the academic and social needs and university support and fulfillment of the aforementioned needs. Rodgers and Summers contend, "The assumption here is that there are many variables involved in predicting the retention patterns of African American students attending PWIs" (p. 186). The only way to see the effectiveness of these different recommendations is to put them into practice.

## Discussion

The conditions and aftermath of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and 400 years of obstacles have been detrimental to the academic success and sense of belonging in Black males in America and make it difficult for them to imagine themselves succeeding in it. Theories of identity development and self-determination can assist us in improving Black males' sense of belonging on university campuses. There are several learning takeaways from this literature review: 1) Since Black males were brought to America, society has perceived them and analyzed

them from a deficit perspective. 2) Identity development cultivates belonging, and knowledge of self creates the ability and awareness to build relationships with others within the same community. 3) Mentor and mentee relationships within the collegiate setting for Black males strengthen their academic sense of belonging by way of role-modeling.

This literature review provides some important takeaways that can benefit higher education when serving Black males attending PWIs. First, acknowledging the historical traumas, triggers, and barriers that have impeded the sense of belonging of black males attending PWIs can set the stage for the difficult but transformative discussions to cultivate inclusion and belonging in their social and academic spaces. Second, more research is needed to connect theoretical frameworks to the Black male collegiate experience. Deeper analyses of theories concerning identity development and self-determination theory may show that when students know who they are, there is a higher chance they will connect with others who share the same interest, identities, and needs. Third, mentorship relationships assist with creating a sense of belonging for Black males who attend PWIs by creating support groups and a reflective lens that provides maturity and guidance within the collegiate space.

A healthy sense of belonging in Black males at PWIs is essential for their academic success, retention, and graduation. When a sense of belonging for Black males is established, the graduation rates should increase and the achievement gap for Black males compared to their counterparts can be narrowed. Black males need safe spaces and environments facilitated by Black male administrators, faculty, and staff who look like them. Further, the stories and life anecdotes of similar individuals must be shared to build the community Black males need to compete and thrive in academia.

## CHAPTER 3

### BLACK MALES' RELATEDNESS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

Disparities within the educational system are prevalent as Black males pursue higher education but do not persist. The 2016 data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicate that only 36% of Black men graduate from a four-year higher education institution in six years. Brooms (2019) found that Black males fall behind the 60% national graduation rate of all male college students. Harper and Quaye (2009) identified five obstacles Black males face while enrolled in PWIs: “(1) racial identity development, (2) being one of few racial/ethnic minority students, (3) lack of same race and ethnicity faculty, (4) curricular content, and (5) culturally responsive pedagogy” (p. 159). Note that of the five areas listed, three involve the need for relatedness (also termed belongingness or sense of belonging). Brooms’ (2019) research also found that Black males’ engagement on campus can enhance and support persistence and success. Especially at PWIs, Black males experience significant cases of racism and institutional climates that cause what Smith (2010) refers to as racial battle fatigue, which I contend may negatively impact Black male relatedness on campus.

Numerous influences inhibit Black males’ relatedness in our current educational structure, according to Strayhorn (2012) who writes that “sense of belonging facilitates Black males’ collegian educational success” and “without a sense of belonging, there can be no educational success for Black men in college” (p. 86). Sense of belonging is related to Black males’ connection to their environments. Typically, connections to groups start at home and

during adolescence. This connection begins with family, siblings, and friends within the communities in which they live. When Black males do not have connections with other older Black males in a mentor-mentee or paternal capacity, their connections to the outside world are impacted. Strayhorn (2012) addresses limited connectivity and discusses the Black male's desire to belong and pursuit of gang affiliation instead of college admission.

Relatedness provides a sense of mattering to others and a sense of belonging to a group (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2012) makes it clear that connections to groups help Black males shape their own identity. Black males are encouraged to belong when they see themselves in mentors and paternal figures within their environments. Black males who come from marginalized urban communities statistically are faced with the family dynamic of a single-parent household or a household where they are raised by a guardian other than their natural birth fathers. As a result, their sense of belonging is impacted by the people they interact with in their communities. The lack of connections may affect Black males as they develop within their relationships, start their careers, and consider attending college.

### Black Male Initiative and Black Fraternities

Black male relatedness at PWIs can be supported by programs such as Black male initiative (BMI) programs, and traditional Black Greek letter fraternities specific to the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). Research studies show that Black males who engage in Black fraternities have more access to resources and support when compared to Black males who do not participate in Black fraternities. Sutton and Kimbrough, (2001) say Black fraternities can be a point of contact to combat the barriers to Black male success and also provide cultural

experiences that lead to community engagement with like-minded individuals attending PWIs (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001).

These organizations all provide important support networks for students (Strayhorn, 2012). According to Brooms and Davis (2017), “Black male initiative (BMI) programs have been developed as a measure both to address some of the challenges they face and provide them with a support network on campus” (p. 2). Brooms and Davis (2017) found that Black males who are involved in male-centered programming have improvement in persistence and success. Harper (2012) identified that Black male students’ interactions with other successful Black male students supported their academic success and led to persistence and graduation. Similarly, McGowan (2016) found that Black males attending PWIs benefit from relationships with other Black males. This study addresses associations between Black males’ relatedness and persistence in a predominantly white institution.

### Persistence in College

Strayhorn (2017) researched Black males’ persistence in college, where persistence is defined as continued enrollment or degree completion at any higher education institution. Persistence involves relatedness because when students feel that they belong at their institutions, they work hard to remain enrolled in them. Continued enrollment is coupled with the students being academically successful. Strayhorn (2017) found three specific factors leading to persistence in Black males: 1) academic preparation and the lack of resources in K-12 years; 2) financial support, financial aid, and socioeconomic status as well as expected family contributions; and 3) a Black male support network in higher education. Cuyjet (1997) makes the point that Black males in college are more likely to persist if they have positive reinforcements

that counteract the harmful myths of their past. He theorized the use of family support systems and supplemental institutional programs as effective avenues to retain aspiring Black males in college. Programs such as BMI could provide that support and help increase persistence.

Beck et al. (2009) reviewed the research on persistence and retention in college and developed a list of six constructs found to be associated with retention: 1) Support services satisfaction, an institution's ability to meet both out-of-classroom and school-related needs; 2) academic integration; 3) social integration, academic and social variables which reflects interactions in the campus environment; 4) degree commitment, the level of importance students attach to earning a diploma; 5) institutional commitment, a student's confidence and satisfaction with the selection of their college/ university; and 6) academic conscientiousness, the students' knowledge of their own academic abilities. Beck et al. (2009) then created the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ), to measure these correlations of persistence for colleges and universities to use as a benchmark for persistence and retention. Beck et al. (2009) found that institutional commitment was the best predictor of retention while academic conscientiousness and academic integration also made significant contributions to the prediction of retention and persistence.

### Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) is described by Deci and Ryan (2000) as a theory of motivation based on humans' basic psychological needs. SDT holds that humans' well-being and intrinsic motivation are based on the three psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Satisfaction of these needs facilitates optimal functionality of natural growth and integration along with fostering personal well-being and constructive social development. In

addition, social environments can promote or deter relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Deci and Ryan (2017) theorize that when the three psychological needs are frustrated or neglected in any area, the individual will display a cognitive and psychological diminishing of their well-being. Further, focusing on needs informs us about the different areas that stifle human nature as well as the individual differences that shape needs and decisions. Because each of the needs identified by Ryan and Deci (2017) is important to healthy human functioning, I will define each and discuss the importance of the three needs (relatedness, competence, and autonomy) to Black male students.

Deci and Ryan (2002) define relatedness as a sense of mattering to others or a sense of belonging to a group. Olswang and Taylor (1997) suggest that by providing environments for social involvement and academic enrichment, Black males will have better inclusive experiences and will maintain higher academic standards. Relatedness is important to Black males because it provides support and community for a population of students who would normally feel isolated. Exner et al. (2013) state, “Black male college students report experiencing condescension, isolation, invisibility, and super-visibility. They also report pervasive feelings of discomfort, frustration, and exhaustion” (p. 5). Strong feelings of relatedness can minimize isolation and invisibility and help create connections with others.

Although relatedness is the focus of this study, I would like to describe the two other needs: competence and autonomy. Deci and Ryan (2004) define competence as a human’s need to interact in their environment by producing desirable outcomes and preventing undesirable outcomes. Competence provides the energy for the process of learning and is essential to providing ownership of the activities and actions in which people succeed. To persist toward graduation, Black males’ feeling of competence is clearly an important factor. Astin (1993) says,



Black male competence is supported when positive relationships within collegiate environments with faculty are established. Autonomy is defined as “the perceived origin or source of one’s own behavior” (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 8). Deci and Ryan (2004) write that autonomy involves an individual’s integration of experiences, vitality, and wholeness in functioning without domination from others. Autonomy allows people to freely bring their resources, interests, and capacities to their environments. Broome and Davis’s (2017) research suggests Black males’ autonomy to connect to their own culture and individual identities increases their persistence.

For Black males’ relatedness and other psychological needs to be met, administrators, faculty, and staff at the colleges and universities they attend must be knowledgeable about what Black males need to live and thrive in their academic setting, especially at PWIs. Based on research from Harper (2012) and Broome and Davis (2017), Black males do not see a physical representation of themselves in the classroom, which is discouraging and not representative of the educational possibilities they can attain. Therefore, colleges and universities need to support students’ basic needs by providing supportive resources, such as mentoring groups who help the students feel included and competent in their academic and social pursuits. According to Deci and Ryan (2017), secure social bonds that satisfy the need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are required to establish intrinsic motivation and self-determination.

### Black Males’ Relatedness in College

Black males often arrive at PWIs with proverbial walls that hinder them from feeling connected due to the lack of new affiliations and connections that reinforce their success (Cuerton, 2003). Cuerton (2003) explains that Black students’ arrival on college campus does not guarantee that they will persist and graduate because a significant proportion of college-bound

Blacks suffer from the results of prior affiliations, associations, and interactions with adverse systemically racial and social-situational circumstances that have left burdening emotional scars, academic scars, and racial scars.

According to Wood and Palmer (2015), researchers have noted that Black males experience high levels of underachievement in higher education depending on the college context. Black males need a sense of belonging while attending PWIs through what Brooms (2019) calls peer-to-peer relationships and associations to build a sense of community. Black males must have a sense of belonging with peers in the classroom. Strayhorn (2017) writes that meaningful and supportive relationships with faculty and staff on PWIs positively influence Black male satisfaction with their college experiences. Fuller et al. (2016) highlight Astin's (1993) research suggesting that a positive relationship with a faculty member is a critical noncognitive factor to the academic achievement of African American students. Brooms (2019) found that Black males are positively affected when they see other Black male students on campus, and it resonates with their psychological sense of belonging. Brooms (2019) makes it clear that Black male engagement is important because it facilitates support, academic integration, social integration, and personal and professional development.

Davis et al. (2004) interviewed 11 Black students attending a southeastern PWI to assess their motivation. Their findings indicated that the connections the students created with their peers and faculty were forms of social integration and encouraged their sense of belonging. Based on their findings, creating connections meant survival in a space where they originally felt unwelcome. Davis et al. (2004) study revealed five emerging themes that impacted their study: 1) unfairness/sabotage/condescension, 2) isolation and connection, 3) "I'm the one who's different," 4) "I have to prove I'm worthy to be here," and 5)

invisibility/super-visibility. These themes indicated that Black students felt alone in their PWI.

One of the key factors of support was when there was another Black student in their classroom or the presence of a Black instructor teaching their course. Davis et al.'s (2004) study highlights the ideas of sense of belonging connecting same-race peers and faculty as important relationships within PWIs.

Sense of belonging shapes the academic success of Black males. Strayhorn (2012) contends that sense of belonging is shaped by social spaces that focus on the context in which engagement occurs: classrooms, residence halls, and/or academic departments. Strayhorn also identified that sense of belonging is an optimal psychological condition. Brooms and Davis (2017) suggests that sense of belonging offers support, instills pride, and serves as a source of motivation. The research shows that Black males' sense of belonging in college is stimulated by both Black faculty and students. Brooms (2019) argues that sense of belonging can be used to examine Black male students' college experiences, and this study is designed for that.

### Current Study

This study investigates the association between college persistence factors and sense of belonging in Black males who attend (PWIs). The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black males attending a PWI report their persistence in college?
2. How do Black males attending a PWI describe their relatedness satisfaction and/or frustration?
3. How do relatedness satisfaction and frustration associate with persistence factors for Black males attending a PWI?

## Methods

In this section of the research the methods used to investigate relatedness and persistence are observed and explained.

### Variables

The variables in this study are relatedness satisfaction and frustration and Beck et al.'s (2009) persistence factors: support services satisfaction, academic integration, social integration, degree commitment, institutional commitment, and academic conscientiousness.

### Participants

The 39 participants in this study were all members of Black male initiative, a college retention program of undergraduate Black male students attending a mid-sized public university in the Midwest. I invited 53 students to participate, and 39 filled out the online questionnaire. All the respondents identified as male, 37 identified as Black, 1 as biracial Black and Native American, and 1 as American Indian or Alaska native. Of the sample, 38 respondents were involved in one or more university organizations, while one was involved in zero organizations. The student involved in no organizations was visiting the Black Male Initiative as a potential interested member. As it pertains to childhood households of the participants, 18 grew up with two parents living in the home, 15 grew up with just their mother, 1 grew up with just their father, four grew up in two different households with their parents split, and one did not grow up with either birth parent in the household.

## Measures

To measure relatedness, I used the relatedness satisfaction and frustration subscales of the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scales survey (BPNSFS; Brenning et al., 2019). Two items measured students' relatedness satisfaction while attending a PWI, and two items measured their relatedness frustration. An example item is, "I feel like I belong at this university" Students answered on a 5-point Likert scale, 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree. This survey was originally administered in Dutch, so this study used a translated version with adjusted content to fit the culture and demographics of this study. Items can be found in Appendix A.

College persistence factors were measured by the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ; Beck et al., 2009), which contains 34 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (Appendix A). The wording of the individual items varied according to the nature of the item (i.e., to ask about satisfaction, frequency, etc.), but all the responses were coded based on 5-point favorability scores (-2 to +2) depending on whether the response corresponded to a negative or positive college experience (Beck et al., 2015). The CPQ consists of six subscales: academic integration, social integration, support services satisfaction, degree commitment, institutional commitment, and academic conscientiousness. The subscale academic conscientiousness was reverse scored for consistent data analyses purposes. According to Beck et al. (2009) and Beck et al. (2015), the CPQ is a valid and reliable measure and was therefore selected for this study.

This full survey combined the BPNSFS and the CPQ along with additional seven items to collect demographic information about the participants' age, year in school, major,

number of years attending the institution, classification, race, number of campus organizations, and number of parents in the household. The final survey contained 53 items.

### Institutional Data

The survey was administered to a specified group at the institution. All the data collected were anonymous and voluntary.

### Procedure

The participants were contacted through an announcement at a weekly Black Male Initiative meeting on campus to ascertain interest in the participation of the study. Verbal and written consent for the survey were collected five minutes before the survey was distributed to the participants; overall, the survey took no longer than 15 minutes to complete. After consenting to participate, the survey was administered via email during the general meeting. Participants could choose when they would like to participate in the survey. Over the course of three weeks, three reminder messages to complete the survey were sent to students who agreed to participate in the survey. The survey was closed after 21 days.

### Results

Before addressing the research items, I computed the means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients for each variable (Table 1). In Table 1, alphas for the relatedness scales ranged from .61 to .75, indicating acceptable internal consistency of the scale used. This is important, especially considering each scale consists of only two items. Similarly, alphas for the persistence scales ranged from .62 to .90 indicating acceptable to high internal consistency. Table 2 shows

the correlations among relatedness satisfaction and frustration and the factors of college persistence.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Alpha Coefficients for Study Variables

	Mean (SD)	Min	Max	No. of Items	Alpha
Years at NIU	2.67 (1.40)	1	5	N/A	N/A
Relatedness satisfaction	3.95 (0.87)	1	5	2	.61
Relatedness frustration	2.24 (1.04)	1	5	2	.75
Support services satisfactions (SSS)	3.23 (0.97)	1.17	5	6	.90
Academic integration (AI)	3.30 (0.67)	2	5	8	.73
Social integration (SI)	3.43 (0.83)	1.5	5	8	.86
Degree commitment (DC)	4.32 (0.80)	2.40	5	5	.78
Institutional commitment (IC)	4.00 (0.78)	2.50	5	4	.62
Academic conscientiousness (AC)	3.77 (1.32)	1	5	3	.84

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Table 2

Correlations among Relatedness Satisfaction and Frustration and Type of Persistence

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Relatedness satisfaction							
2. Relatedness frustration	.008						
3. Student support satisfaction	<b>.354*</b>	-.028					
4. Academic integration	.314	.257	<b>.630**</b>				
5. Social integration	<b>.472**</b>	-.021	<b>.513**</b>	<b>.438**</b>			
6. Degree commitment	.111	.029	.090	.239	.272		
7. Institutional commitment	.150	.134	-.015	.198	.084	<b>.609**</b>	
8. Academic conscientiousness	-.062	<b>-.593**</b>	<b>-.367*</b>	.021	-.213	<b>.338*</b>	.303

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

### Research Question 1

To address RQ1, which asked how Black males attending a PWI report their persistence in college, I looked at the means to understand the persistence levels of the Black males in this study (see Table 1). All self-reported persistence factors were above the scale midpoint (means range from 3.23 to 4.32), indicating moderately high persistence in all areas. Additionally, degree commitment has the highest mean of 4.32, indicating students are very committed to completing their degree. The lowest mean is student support satisfaction at 3.23, indicating that students are moderately satisfied with the support services that they receive from the university.

### Research Question 2

To address RQ2, which asked how Black males attending a PWI reported their relatedness satisfaction and/or frustration with their university, I looked at the relatedness means in Table 1. The relatedness satisfaction is relatively high, with a mean of 3.95, indicating that Black male students felt like they belonged and related to others at the university. The relatedness frustration mean is below the midpoint at 2.24, indicating students had relatively low frustration regarding their relatedness on campus.

### Research Question 3

To address RQ3, I looked at the correlation coefficients among relatedness satisfaction and frustration and persistence factors. In looking at the first two columns of Table 2, three correlations are statistically significant. Relatedness frustration and academic



conscientiousness show a high negative correlation ( $r = -.593^{**}$ ), indicating that students whose need for relatedness is being frustrated are low in academic conscientiousness. Conversely, students low in relatedness frustration tended to be high in academic conscientiousness. Further, relatedness satisfaction has a high correlation ( $r = .472^{**}$ ) with social integration, which indicates that the third significant correlation is between relatedness satisfaction and student support satisfaction at ( $r = .354^*$ ), which indicates that students feel their need for support as students are being satisfied.

### Discussion

The objective of this research study was to investigate levels of persistence and relatedness as well as associations among persistence and relatedness for Black males attending a predominantly White mid-sized Midwest university. Typically, research for Black males within the field involves qualitative interviews, but for this part of the study, a quantitative method was used. This correlations study was the first of its kind using the BPNSFS and CPQ together to find the correlation between persistence and sense of belonging for Black males attending PWIs. This study showed that Black males at PWIs reported their persistence as relatively high, indicating that they are generally committed to persisting at the university. Another notable finding shows that Black males attending PWIs report their relatedness satisfaction as moderately high and their frustrations as moderately low, meaning Black males feel like they belong and are not frustrated with their relatedness on campus. Finally, the results show significant associations among some of the persistence factors and relatedness, all of which are consistent with self-determination theory.

### Connections of Black Males in Higher Education

There were many connections among the participants, one being race and another being campus involvement. For example, 38 out of 39 students were involved in more than one Black organization at the PWI such as BMI, fraternities, social clubs, and community service groups. Another connection was between students and student leaders. Not all participants were leaders by way of having official leadership titles in student organizations, but all participants were students.

### Persistence of Black Males in Higher Education

Black male persistence in higher education reported in this study looks very similar to results from the Beck et al. (2009) study. This is notable because the current study only surveyed Black males, whereas the sample in Beck et al. (2009) was diverse and included White, Black, Asian, and Latino male and female students from different universities. The highest mean in both studies was degree commitment, indicating that students are very determined to attain their degree in their specific field of choice. The lowest persistence means in the current study, support service satisfaction, was similar in magnitude when compared to the Beck et al. (2009) study. In each study, the support service satisfaction means were slightly higher than the scale midpoint, indicating a moderate level of satisfaction with student support services provided by the university. The lowest persistence means in the Beck et al. (2009) study was social integration, and the mean in the current study was very similar in magnitude. This shows that students in both studies felt a moderate to high connection to people and groups on campus.

It is important that persistence was relatively high among participants in this study because, as Harper (2006b) writes, Black males' familial and community support are important influences on their persistence in college. Williams and Wood (2013) show that extensive communication with faculty advisors, faculty, and staff at the university and intramural sport activities are predictive of persistence.

### Relatedness of Black Males in Higher Education

Results of this study show that Black male students' perceived relatedness on campus was relatively high, and their frustration with belonging was relatively low. That finding connects to Harris et al. (2015), who showed that Black men's relatedness with faculty, staff, students, and the general community illustrate feelings of mattering, value, and care that facilitate success. Harris et al. (2015) also states that when relatedness is unfulfilled, it causes alienation and disparate outcomes.

This high relatedness finding contradicts some research showing Black male relatedness is low on university campuses. Relatedness is low at PWIs due to Black males lack of connection to White faculty, staff, and peers. Solórzano et al., (2000) says Black male college students struggle with feeling welcomed by White faculty, staff and fellow students further causing them to feel unaccepted in their PWI environment. Harper (2006) research reveals that Black males do not integrate well at PWIs, and his research leans on the cultural disconnection and lack of representation found in the institutions. Baker (2013) says due to PWIs not providing a proactive climate of support Black males are at a disadvantage. Baker (2013) also acknowledges the need Black males have for faculty and staff support.

Perhaps one reason belongingness was high in this sample is the high engagement in campus organizations. Studies have shown that Black males feel they belong when there are organizations and programs available to them that promote social interaction and community building (Simmons, 2013). Simmons writes, “Higher education institutions must be strategic in involving African American men early in ethnic-based student organizations” (p. 71). Simmons refers to Pascarella and Teretizini (2005), who write that Black males who are socially engaged on campus will persist and graduate, and it is the responsibility of the college or university to provide engagement opportunities. All but one of the participants in this study were engaged in some type of university program or initiative. Their involvement with the programs and initiatives indicates engagement and a desire to connect on campus that could have caused their high ratings of relatedness on the survey.

Another possible explanation for the high relatedness results in this study is that the survey did not measure relatedness well. For example, a degree of response bias could be at work in that participants felt compelled to answer items in a positive manner to express high relatedness to the researcher, whether or not it was accurate. This bias could have been compounded by the fact that all but one of the participants were active in campus organizations, and participants were recruited at a BMI meeting.

Nevertheless, the high relatedness expressed by Black males in this study contradicts some past research, and further research is needed to better understand relatedness of Black males at PWIs and at college and universities in general. Perhaps a qualitative research approach would help illustrate the nuances of Black males’ relatedness, by using probing and follow-up questions to get at underlying truths difficult to uncover with survey items.

### Connections Between Relatedness and Persistence

In the current study, the results show three significant associations among persistence factors and relatedness. First, there was a significant negative correlation between relatedness frustration and academic conscientiousness. Students high in relatedness frustration tended to be low in academic conscientiousness, or students low in relatedness frustration were high in academic conscientiousness. This means that students who do as little as possible, often miss class, and turn in assignments late also feel disconnected with campus. The opposite is also true, that students who feel connected to campus tended to engage in positive academic behaviors.

The second significant association was a positive correlation between relatedness satisfaction and social integration. This refers to the academic and social variables which reflect interactions in the campus environment in which students feel their needs for relatedness is being satisfied and typically feel socially integrated. This means that students feel connectedness with staff, faculty, students and have a general sense of school pride.

When students are engaged in organizations and programming, social integration is at work and fostering environments of relatedness. The need for relatedness is being satisfied due to campus activities and involvement. Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement shares three concepts: 1) the input students bring, 2) environments in which they live, and 3) the output and actions they commit to affect their involvement. Social integration is shaped by student involvement and likely strengthens the comfort of Black students. Research shows that Black students who do not establish supportive communities at PWIs often experience feelings of discomfort, social isolation, and stress, which can lead to attrition (Feagin et al., 1996; Ford & Lang, 1992; Sailes, 1993).

Social integration is a key in the study by Guiffrida (2003), who interviewed 88 Black students at a PWI to understand the role of Black organizations in facilitating social integration. His findings indicated Black students believed that only another Black student could understand them within their cultural context, language, and appearance. Based on Guiffrida's (2003) research, Black students felt safe among other Black students at PWIs. Higher education institutions have a responsibility to the students they serve to provide social integration. Bridges et al. (2004) found that PWIs must support student engagement in organizations for the few Black males enrolled to increase relatedness and persistence. Strayhorn (2012) contends that the lack of cultural integration within the academic environment at PWIs causes a disconnect from Black males to that environment.

The third significant association was also positive between relatedness satisfaction and student support satisfaction. Students high in relatedness satisfaction and student support satisfaction indicated they were satisfied with the institution's ability to meet out-of-classroom and school-related needs. This is an indication that students are satisfied with academic advisement, institutional communication, cost, opportunities, rules, regulations, procedures, fairness, and general questions about their education. Harris and Wood's (2013) research shows that when the relatedness of students of color is not satisfied in the institution, the students are less likely to utilize helpful university resources and persist to graduation. In response to this issue, smaller institutions like community colleges have responded to the challenge and established BMI programs to increase retention, persistence, and graduation (Harris & Wood, 2013).

The results from the current study support SDT in that motivation and behavior thrive when humans' need for relatedness is satisfied. Results of Research Question 1 showed that

the Black males in this study experienced relatively high persistence and were committed to persisting at the university. For Research Question 2, Black males attending this PWI reported their relatedness satisfaction as moderately high and their frustrations as moderately low, meaning Black males felt like they belonged and were not frustrated with their relatedness on campus. In addressing research question 3, there are significant associations between relatedness and three persistence factors, which is consistent with self-determination theory.

### Limitations

There were some limitations within this study which led me to rethink how I would conduct this study differently in the future. The first limitation is my sample size is small. Another limitation is this that this study was completed at one university with no comparison group, which makes it difficult to assess what is causing high or low correlations. The third limitation noticed is all the participants were members of BMI, which is why their sense of belonging was high. Another limitation is the demographic content collected should have had an indication of sexual orientation and pronouns. There is a realization that I need to measure all Black men's sense of belonging at a larger institution and or multiple institutions with a larger sample size, both those students who are active in similar BMI programs and those who are not. The limitations listed would have enhanced this study.

### Recommendations

My recommendations for further research are to utilize the results of this study as a foundation and to dive into the psychological needs and persistence as they affect Black males in and out of the classroom. This is an important area of research because Black males' persistence

at PWIs has been part of discussions on resilience and grit. This study opens the door to discussing relatedness as a source of persistence in Black males attending PWIs. Further research could use survey methodology but with a larger group of participants, including Black male students who belong to organizations and those who do not. Some added variables in future studies could include number of siblings, name and type of organization they are involved in, high school organizations and sport participation, mentor relationships, and paternal relationships. Additionally, future studies could investigate organizations other than the BMI group to draw participants from. Opening this study up to other Black male groups could provide more perspectives and experiences.

The objective of this study was to investigate persistence and relatedness by asking about persistence factors and relatedness satisfaction and frustration for Black males who attend a mid-sized Midwestern PWI. Black males can thrive in predominantly White academic environments if they are socially integrated in a way in which they can express themselves and create a sense of community. Colleges and universities should undertake changes that can improve feelings of relatedness and belonging among their Black male students and that, in turn, is likely to increase the students' persistence and retention.



## CHAPTER 4

### BARBERSHOP TALK EXPERIENCE

The results from the previous study support and drive the pilot study of The Barbershop Talk Experience discussed in Chapter 4. The Barbershop Talk Experience pilot serves as an intervention I proposed and implemented to create a sense of belonging in Black males.

Black males experience high levels of underachievement in higher education depending on the college context (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Based on NCES (2016) data, 36% of Black men graduate from a four-year higher education institution in a six-year time frame. Brooms (2019) uses these 2016 data to show Black males fall outside the 60% national rate of all males and contends Black male engagement on campus provides critical insight about Black male perspectives that can enhance and support persistence and success. Black males' sense of belonging is especially key at PWIs, as Black males experience significant cases of racism within institutional climates that cause what Smith (2010) refers to as racial battle fatigue. According to Smith, battle fatigue is mental, emotional, and physical strain that can lead to psychophysiological symptoms. Both battle fatigue and a lack of sense of belonging contribute to the alarming number of Black males not being retained and/or achieving academic success with an end goal of graduation. Black males need a sense of belonging while attending PWIs, and Brooms (2019) says peer-to-peer relationships and associations build a sense of community. Peer-to-peer interactions and associations are important, but Astin's (1993) research suggests that a positive relationship with a faculty member is a critical noncognitive factor in the academic achievement of African American students.

The Barbershop Talks Experience (BTE) is a monthly event that I established at a Midwest PWI as an intervention to create and improve the sense of belonging for Black males attending the university. As an intervention, my goal was to create pockets of community in which Black males can communicate and feel included within larger spaces where they perceive that their voices are not heard. I originally created Barbershop Talks with a group of colleagues to implement a connection to Black culture for Black males in an environment where elements of culture have a low visibility. In this third paper, I implement the program with new participants at a different institution. After an initial BTE at their campus, I ask them about their institutional belongingness at their PWI and their opinion of the Barbershop Talk Experience.

### Black Male Sense of Belonging

Faculty staff interaction is just as important as peer-to-peer interaction within the higher education environment. Black males must have a sense of belonging as peers in the classroom as well as see and experience Black male staff and faculty. Strayhorn (2017) says meaningful and supportive relationships with faculty and staff at PWIs positively influence Black male satisfaction with their college experiences. Brooms (2019) says that Black males are also affected positively when they see other Black male students on campus, and it resonates with their psychological sense of belonging. According to Strayhorn (2017) and Brooms (2019), Black males need positive relationships with other Black male students and university faculty and staff of color to increase belongingness. Brooms (2019) makes it clear that Black male engagement is important, and their engagement facilitates support, academic integration, social integration, and personal and professional development.

Sense of belonging shapes the success of Black males academically. Strayhorn (2012) contends that sense of belonging is shaped by social spaces, including the context in which engagement occurs: classrooms, residence halls, and academic departments. Strayhorn also found that sense of belonging is an optimal psychological condition. Brooms and Davis (2017) add that sense of belonging offers support, instills pride, and serves as a source of motivation. Brooms (2019) notes that sense of belonging can be used to examine Black male students' college experiences; this study was designed to do that.

### Barbershop Talks

According to the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC, 2016), since the beginning of the 19th century, barbershops have served as an important space for Blacks. They were not only places for hair care services but communities where Black people could be vulnerable and discuss important issues within the community. Barbershops were spaces in which customers competed in friendly competitions like chess, cards, and dominoes while engaging in conversations surrounding local gossip, politics, and their community. Barbershops are a social staple within the Black community and considered by those within the community to be sanctuaries and safe havens for Black people. Many films use barbershops to illustrate Black culture in America, such as 1988's *Coming to America*, 1992's *Malcom X*, and 2002's *Barbershop*. These films showcase Black relationships and culture within the Black community.

The barbershop community has remained a staple within the Black community and has developed into the proverbial counseling center for all Black male community members willing to share their life story with their barber. According to Wilson (2022), "In 2016 a community in

Arkansas led an initiative to train barbers as mental health advocates.” This training is a prime example of barbershops being a space of mental health support and socialization of all ages from various walks of life. The sense of belonging cultivated in a barbershop promotes the consistent socialization of Black males within their community.

For this research a barbershop setting was used to create a sense of belonging in a community that would not ordinarily have a cultural space to represent the marginalized students. The Barbershop Talks Experience was developed because of the noticeable decline of Black male leadership and accountability within student organizations in 2018 at Northern Illinois University (NIU). Several departments within the university were consulted, and the trend of Black male leadership decline was recognized by the NIU police department, the Counseling Help Assistance Necessary for College Education (C.H.A.N.C.E.) Program, the Academic Advising Center, and most importantly, Black male students. The common trend the students and professional staff communicated was that the Black male students did not feel like they belong in leadership at the institution. Noticing the decline of leadership, I decided to create an environment for leadership.

#### Purpose of the Barbershop Talk Experience

The purpose of the barbershop is to ensure a space for staff of African descent, who identify as men, to facilitate discussions with collegiate men of African descent to build cross-generational community and legacy development. I created the Barbershop Talks Experience to provide awareness and dialogue about five different domains that NIU administrators and alumni found to be areas needing improvement in Black males, those areas are: contemporary awareness, historical self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, collectivism, universal

wellness, and financial literacy. Each domain guided discussions with the possibilities of leading to other topics that could apply to the student participants. In the barbershop talk setting, historical self-awareness focused on an awareness of the family dynamic and upbringing that informs contemporary awareness as the Black males come into their knowledge of being. Interpersonal relationships were the social connections and affiliations with others that created collectivism within the established community and cultivated universal wellness and financial literacy that encouraged the establishment of individual legacies.

### Barbershop Collaboration

The process of creating a barbershop experience involved investment of time by professional staff to interact with the students. The key to cultivating a barbershop experience was to communicate with and listen to the students' wants and needs within their social spaces on their college campus. The selected location for students to have dialogue was important for cultivating a sense of safety, feelings of vulnerability, and openness to speak. The selected location had to best serve students and remain accessible to participants who may require disability accommodations. We found that the proper location of the residence halls made it easier for students to indulge in conversations that lead to a sense of belonging.

Once the wants and needs such as location, food, topics of discussion, student representation and voice of the student were heard, participants were determined, and the strategies to fulfill those wants and needs were developed in collaboration with the student participants and faculty/staff of the institution. Several Black male organizations were involved in the first barbershop talk at NIU through support and publicity. The organizations included all of the Black fraternities, BMI, and the Black male mentoring programs. The student leaders

within the various groups informed me, as their trusted administrator, about the topics and issues the Black males wanted to discuss.

### Barbershop Talk Experience Pilot

In 2018, a pilot barbershop talk was created and hosted at NIU. Collaborations were established, and a setting in the residence hall where the most students gathered was selected as an optimal meeting location. All Black male students involved in eight different Black male organizations, had their belongingness needs met due to their membership within their groups. It turns out that in the initial Barbershop Talk the majority More than 50 Black male students participated. The first barbershop talk focused on the topic of building a legacy and the rhetorical question of “Why am I here?” Black males provided perspectives on why they were attending college with a range of topics such as manhood vs masculinity and self-awareness. The first barbershop talk lasted for two hours. Food along with haircuts for the participants were provided to create a barbershop environment that encourages Black males to be open and communicate.

Through the first barbershop talk, the idea of creating safe spaces to build a sense of belonging was identified as necessary. Since then, other four-year colleges and universities, high schools, middle schools, and community leaders have requested the experience be recreated to fit their constructs. The barbershop talks have remained successful and highly attended and anticipated due to the engagement within a space in which Black males can create and feel a sense of belonging.

### Barbershop Talks Pilot Study

In this study, I collected data using a focus group and focused on the relatedness satisfaction and relatedness frustration of the participants. The focus group for this study provided narratives supporting the theoretical constructs of relatedness within self-determination theory as well as an understanding of a practical approach for increasing relatedness in Black male college students. The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent do Black male undergraduate students attending PWIs feel a sense of belonging before attending barbershop talks?
2. To what extent do Black male undergraduate students attending PWIs feel a sense of belonging after attending barbershop talks?
3. How do Black male undergraduate students express their sense of belonging at their PWI?
4. How do Black male undergraduate students think barbershop talks will influence their sense of belonging at their PWI?
5. Is the barbershop talks program a promising way to increase Black male students' sense of belonging at PWIs?

### Methodology

This section focuses on the variables, participants, instrumentation, research questions, data collection procedures, and data analysis strategies. The study was approved by my institution's human subjects review committee.

### Setting

The setting for this study is a large Midwest U.S. college campus, with a population of more than 50,000 students. This is much larger than the original institution where the Barbershop Talk Experience was created, which had a population of approximately 16,000 students. Another major difference in the setting of this study is that there are no Black Male Initiative groups on the pilot campus, whereas there were BMI groups at the original institution. This setting is not affiliated with the original institution, that the Barbershop Talks were created. This PWI is a four-year institution offering degrees ranging from bachelor's to doctorate degrees. The facility used for this study is a cultural center on the college campus to which the participants of this study are culturally connected. The setting was designed to create societal familiarity within the physical space.

### Participants

A total of nineteen Black male students participated in the Barbershop Talks Experience pilot study; 12 of these students completed a short survey, asking about demographics; and 9 of those students participated in the separate focus group. I invited the entire campus via social media and flyers posted around campus. All the respondents identified as male. Of the sample, 10 out of 12 respondents were involved in one or more organizations, while two were involved in no organizations. As it pertains to childhood households of the participants, four grew up with two parents living in the home, five grew up with just their mother, one grew up in two different households with their parents split, and two preferred not to answer.



### Data Collection

I collected demographic characteristics from 12 of the Black male students who participated in the BTE. The focus group, consisting of 9 students, followed the BTE, and I asked participants questions about their belongingness on campus and the Barbershop Talk Experience. The focus group provided qualitative data consisting of perspectives of Black males that are often unheard. In a one-hour focus group session, I asked the following questions:

1. Use one word to describe your experience in the Barbershop Talk and explain.
2. How was this Barbershop Talk Experience for you? and why?
3. Do you feel any different from before this experience?
4. Does this event cause you to see change in yourself?
5. Would you attend this event regularly?
6. What did you take away from this experience, did this barbershop experience create a sense of belonging for you?

### Procedure

The participants were contacted through the social media account Instagram at the four-year institution. Verbal and written consent for the BTE were collected one hour prior to the BTE focus group. The consent form took no longer than 10 minutes to complete. After the completion of the consent, the BTE took place for 19 participants. Within the BTE soft lo-fi music played to create the ambience and relaxing environment. Food such as chicken, french-fries, cookies, potato chips and water were available for the students to lighten the mood and provide comfort. As a prop, a chessboard which is often found in barbershop settings was in

the middle of the floor where the conversations would take place and a barber was in the room providing free haircuts to further create the barbershop environment. The one-hour focus group followed the two-hour BTE, while the music food and barbering continued for the 9 focus group participants, maintain the barbershop environment.

The Barbershop Talk Experience as a pilot created a moment for dialogue and connected conversations that allowed Black males the opportunity to feel free to communicate and be visible without worry. We discussed several topics, such as why they are at the university, what their goals are, the sense of community they have built within the collegiate space, what they enjoy, their experiences as Black males on campus, and what support they need.

The Barbershop Talk Experience and the Barbershop talk focus group were distinct parts of this study. The Barbershop Talk Experience involved free dialogue of the Black male experience on their college campus. The focus group provided the data for this study and dove deeper into the discussion of their belongingness on campus and their experience in the Barbershop Talk Experience.

### Research Design

For this research study, I borrowed a popular qualitative methodological approach from Glaser and Straus's (1967) grounded theory approach for the coding process. In grounded theory, researchers create a theory or understanding of a phenomenon using systematically gathered and analyzed data (Straus & Corbin, 1990). Charmaz (1995) describes grounded theory as a method applied to research to code, conceptualize, categorize, and create themes as well as an evolving theoretical approach.

To code data, grounded theory uses a constant comparative method encompassing three types and stages of data analysis: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Straus and Corbin (1990) define open coding as the first stage in grounded theory, which involves the initial encounter with the data by categorizing and labeling it. The second stage, axial coding, follows open coding and involves organizing the categories and observing the possible relationships among the categories in the data. The third and final stage of grounded theory is referred to as selective coding and involves the researcher reflecting on the main ideas from the data as a result of the open and axial coding to identify the themes (Straus & Corbin, 1990).

This study, the Barbershop Talks Experience, was proposed as an intervention for PWIs looking to encourage a sense of belonging for Black males. This coding method, borrowed from grounded theory, was used to understand the themes behind Black males' sense of belonging as it related to their attendance at PWIs as well as their perspectives of BTE. The coding approach in this study allowed Black males in predominantly White spaces to express their perspectives in places in which they otherwise may not feel heard. The codes and themes extracted from this study's research can be seen in Figure 1.

## Findings

### Codes and Themes

The codes gathered from this pilot study were found through memo notes taken during the barbershop talk focus group and through watching and transcribing the video recording of the focus group. The process of watching the focus group video was completed a total of three times to ensure all participant voices, facial expressions, head nods, and gestures were captured. Nine

codes make up the three themes identified in this study: feelings of discouragement, feelings of belonging, and processing belonging.

The participants in this study were identified based on their year in school and the order in which they began to speak in the focus group. The first freshman to speak is identified as F1, the second is identified as F2, and the third is identified as F3. The only sophomore participant is identified as SM1, and the three juniors are identified J1, J2, and J3. The transfer junior is identified as TJ1, and the graduate student is identified as G1. After several viewings of the data and transcription, these identifiers were used as a best practice.

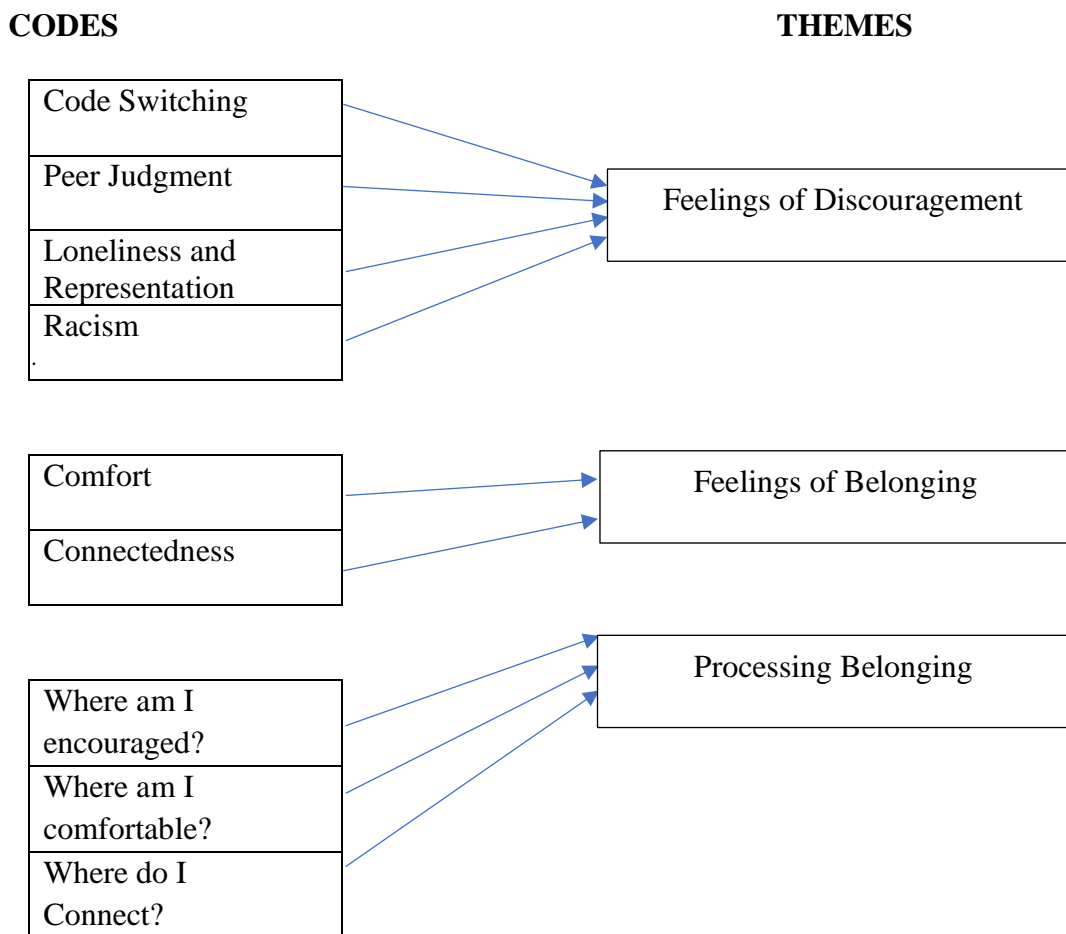


Figure 1. Codes and themes constructed from the focus group.

## Theme 1: Feelings of Discouragement

The theme, feelings of discouragement, was developed due to all nine participants in the focus group speaking to their negative experiences at their PWI. Research findings from Von Robertson and Chaney (2015) determined Black males attending PWIs have a difficult time creating a sense of belonging because of oppression, privilege, discrimination, and stereotype threat. Those similar findings can be found in the codes of this study. The five codes represent a discouraging situation that caused the participants to find it difficult to feel a sense of belonging: code switching, peer judgment, loneliness, representation, and racism. These codes also provide perspective as to why the increase in attrition for Black males occurs.

### Code Switching

Code switching, according to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2023), is the practice of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation. Code switching was based on the study participants saying they felt they had to code switch to communicate in their educational space. One of the participants, TJ1, mentioned being able to “freely talk” in the Barbershop Talk space and felt comfortable communicating without the pressure to code-switch.

An example of participants referring to code switching comes from SM1:

Code-switching is...not even necessarily the code switching but being able to formulate how you're saying and how you're feeling should never be something to be ashamed about, especially as a Black man. That's something that we put against each other, like measuring Blackness because how I speak. That means I'm not for the people which is not determined by how I talk.

Code switching from this student's perspective was necessary for him to feel comfortable communicating in White spaces where he was the minority as well as find comfort in Black spaces where he was a part of the community. In an interesting breakdown of the example

mentioned, SM1 felt he should not have to code switch around White students, faculty, and staff, although he also mentioned having to code switch around other Black students to display Blackness in a way to show he felt he belonged. The question of, am I Black enough to belong in Black spaces, was a question that challenged the participants' sense of belonging outside of the Barbershop Talk space. Four other participants agreed by nodding and participating in side chatter that agreed with the need to code-switch in White and Black spaces. The impact of code-switching shows the students felt the need to code-switch to be accepted by both Black and White students and faculty; this was one cause for discouragement. Code-switching transitions to the next code that creates a feeling of discouragement, and that is peer judgment.

### Peer Judgment

Peer judgment as a code was the concern the participants had about their Black peers who may have come from more urban or more suburban environments. The disrespect they expressed was based on the participant feeling judged and disrespected. There was the idea of being negatively viewed as not Black enough to fit in Black peer circles of influence based on how they talked and/or hobbies they were interested in. The code of peer judgment is illustrated in the statement SM1 made.

It's about respect really. That's the bottom line, that if I can have respect for you as a Black man regardless of where we all came from and the way we were raised and differences in education, that's where the real change starts. And I think that's something that I'm putting my life moving forward is there's not enough baseline respect. A lot of people be like, "They earned their street credits and all that." Bro, we got something, [someone in a barrel?] stuff and that's what-- I mean, to be a revolutionary, that's what White people offer us is to drag each other down. So in order to get to where we want to be, we just got to-- it's just respect. I don't have to like every Black person because we're all different. And it's nice to embrace individuality too because celebrating our differences is also a part of the Black experience. But it's about respect.

Based on SM1's example, there was a noticeable feeling that his peers were judging him and based on the side chatter of the other participants when SM1 mentioned respect, other participants shared the same viewpoint. Ultimately, all of the participants agreed they want to be respected on their college campus.

### Loneliness and Representation

Loneliness and/or feelings of solitude was a feeling the participants agreed that they felt due to being the only Black male in their classes and/or their residence halls. SM1 stated:

I was taking the bus to the park every day to try and find that sense of community. It's like I didn't live there (residence hall), so I always felt like I was always playing tag along or just trying to catch up on anything that people were doing. Because it's like I wasn't immediately accepted by the other Black people because they all knew each other because they live with each other. And I had to catch up with them, and I'd always be like, "What are y'all doing?" This or that. And then it was so discouraging and alienating, even when it's like you're trying your hardest to fit in.

There was a strong desire for community from all the participants who agreed that they had to step out of their comfort zone to not feel alone. TJ1 mentioned that he was not immediately accepted by other students due to being new, but after more exposure to the different crowds and rebuilding friendships with fellow students he knew from his high school connecting became easier. The participants noted they were on their own individual journeys to find a connection with others who looked like them. F2 said:

I went to a predominantly White high school, actually a predominantly Hispanic and White, I should say. The same percentage of Black people [as here], about 6% and stuff. But even there, because it's high school, you all are in one place, so you going to find the people that you hang with in college. Unless they live with you or they are in your classes, you got to go out and look for them. And I notice that the most concentrated place were Black students, at least for freshmen.

Within the crosstalk, participant G1 stated, "There is a historical reason," and asked F2, "Do you know the historical reason?" F2 answered,

Yeah. And I'm like, "It can't be no coincidence." But on top of that, it's just not being able to – I mean, it ain't a lot of us [Black male students and faculty/staff]. I didn't do Circuit. I wish I did, but...that they already got their friend groups. It's hard as a [first year] student.

The students felt lonely, which equated to them feeling like they were on an island. Feelings of isolation and a lack of connectedness encouraged the students' detachment to the institution and to their peers. They noted that representation matters and expressed the need to see themselves represented in the classroom and the desire to connect. The participants believed seeing themselves in the classroom and in their residential spaces would increase their feelings of connection to the campus.

### Racism

The code of racism stemmed from the oppression participants felt within this study. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2023), racism is defined as policies, behaviors, and rules harmful and unfair to people based on their race. The participants had the feeling they were being oppressed due to their race and the number of negative interactions they experienced with their White peers. As an example, one of the participants mentioned the drastic separation within his residence hall during his stay on campus because of America being in a political climate of civil unrest. SM1 contended, "Because I had to cling together with a few Black people in the building, right? There was a racial war. It was just trashed up. And I was taking the bus to try and find that sense of community." The participants were trying to find spaces in which they felt comfortable rather than targeted. The feelings and awareness of racial tension were heightened based on political ideologies, heightened conflicts with law enforcement, and attempting to approach a lifestyle of normalcy post-COVID-19.



## Theme 2: Feelings of Belonging

The second theme in this study leans toward a positive lens and showcases the fulfillment the Barbershop Talk pilot program sought to create: feelings of belonging. Feelings of belonging resonated within the focus group as the participants opened up about their desire to have consistent programming geared toward their feeling included and as though they had a place to thrive on campus. Two codes emerged that were based on the participants' verbalized interest in connecting with each other: comfort and connectedness. Connectedness relied on students feeling comfortable cultivating a sense of belonging. The two codes provide a significant understanding of what the participants wanted: a sense of belonging.

### Comfort

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, (2023) comfort is defined as the easing or alleviation of a person's feelings of distress. The code of comfort comes from the first question asked of the participants: "If you can describe one word based on the Barbershop experience you just had, what would it be?" FR1 described the one word as

Comfortable, for me. A lot of the interactions we have on campus aren't exactly comforting or comfortable, so I feel like stuff like this, we know what you're getting into - or you don't know what you're getting into. You know that people around here share a commonality with you. It makes you feel more-- it eases you into the conversation.

All the participants provided a one-word description that led toward the idea of comfort and vulnerability: to be free and open to communicate. The culture of comfort was created in this Barbershop Talk Experience from the soft lo-fi hip-hop music playing and the comfort food provided. Providing the elements of music and food in the Barbershop Talk space kept the participants comfortable and engaged. As the conversation in the Barbershop Talk Experience

progressed, the feeling of comfort became more evident as it was referred to often. During the discussion I asked the question, “Would you say that this event caused you to see a change in yourself as you build community?” FR3 replied saying, “Yeah,” and FR 2 said,

Yeah, it definitely made me feel more comfortable, like a lot of those upperclassmen. I’ve seen them all here every night before, but I never really went up to them and introduced myself and said, “Listen.” But now I have. I feel comfortable enough to do that and say, “Hey, what’s going on? How are you doing?” Where before this, I wouldn’t be able to do that.

As our dialogue continued, the comfort level of the participants began to increase to the point in which we had to be reminded of the time constraints we were under. The comfort level of everyone involved was encouraging, and it was evident that the participants were relaxed.

### Connectedness

Connectedness can also be defined as sense of belonging or relatedness. The code of connectedness was the most referenced code by the Barbershop Talks Experience focus group participants. When the first focus group prompt was asked, “Describe your experience with one word,” seven of the nine participants referred to feeling connected with the group in some way. Establishing connection was witnessed as the participants began to laugh and even have side chatter agreeing with each other and connecting on the different experiences mentioned within the focus group. The participants finding connections and similarities among themselves was amazing to watch, as they all became comforted knowing they were not alone and were able to identify the same struggles. FR1 said,

So I’m new. Since I got on campus, I’ve only been trying to connect with freshmen... We share a lot of commonalities, but I realize the value of just clicking it with other people who just similar to you in any way. And I realized I had connections if you would like... or at least literally acknowledge until they came to me. Of course, you, you know my brothers, so stuff like that. [Living] experiences helped you realize how connected you are.

FR1 acknowledged that he had been looking to connect and the barbershop talk provided that connection he was searching for.

Midway through the focus group I asked the participants about the differences they may have felt before the Barbershop Talk Experience, and TJ1 said,

I'll say, so basically one of the things I felt is it's connected more people. I can talk sports on public to the public all day every day, right? That's something that is more acceptable for, especially in male, to think of and talk about. But when you get to things like playing Super Smash Bros, watching anime, things like that. Those aren't things that – well, I'm not scared of them. I will wear things and dress different things of them, but I'm not going to wear it on my sleeve. I'm not going to say that, "Oh, I like anime." Do you know what I mean? So it's something that in an uncomfortable situation that is easy that I've been able to do and talk to people about so I don't think I'm definitely got to hear that. That's changed.

TJ1 felt connected and said he was able to let his guard down in the room and talk about his likes and dislikes. Connectedness for the participants seemed to be a desire that was fulfilled in the Barbershop Talk Experience. It was evident that the participants were searching for a connection that indicated the start of a sense of belonging.

### Theme 3: Processing Belonging

The final theme that developed from this focus group is processing belonging. Throughout the focus group, the participants were collaboratively processing discouragement, comfort, and the connections they were making with each other. This processing led to the third theme of processing belonging in that belonging was processed through trauma and the disconnection from their environment while searching for a connection. The Barbershop Talk Experience provided a space for processing through three questions: 1) Where am I encouraged? 2) Where am I comforted? and 3) Where do I connect? These codes were derived from the previous two themes, which informed how creating a sense of belonging occurs.

### Where Am I Encouraged?

The codes making up the theme of discouragement inform the themes for participants' areas of encouragement. In the collective conversation, acknowledgment of the discouragement codes created a camaraderie among the participants. The participants had similar thoughts and experiences as Black males. Of the nine participants, no one disagreed with the discouraging codes. However, the code question, "Where am I encouraged?" spoke to the facility and space created for them to connect with each other.

### Where Am I Comforted?

The code "Where am I comforted?" also directly spoke to the environment created for the Barbershop Talk Experience. The experience led to a comfortable space on campus where participants could be transparent and authentic. As comfort increased, so did the engagement within the Barbershop Talk Experience. The participants' high level of comfort made engaging them enjoyable.

### Where Do I Connect?

This code "Where do I connect?" is profound. This code was developed based on the very last focus group question: "Did you feel like this Barbershop Talk Experience made you feel like you belong?" FR2 replied, "Yeah, partly," while TJ1 said, "Yeah, so I did change in that sense, but it definitely, like I said, put steps towards it, but I felt like I belonged before. So in a way, yes, but also, you changed it." The best response to the final question that established this code came from FR1 when he said,

Everyone belongs here. It's just a matter of where, when going out, in what space. Those are the type you take up here. Where I can take, peace of mind. I don't have to worry about anything because...I have the ability to be here and I am here. So, I know all of you. It's just a matter of how or who would I feel most comfortable with, if that makes sense. Like where would I not have that much of a hard time.

Their knowledge of belonging in the space and their awareness of that belonging was eye opening based on FR1's response. The participants knew they belonged based on their enrollment in the college, but for these participants, the code "Where do I connect?" referred to finding a space within the place where they are, a space where encouragement and comfort could resonate with them.

### Linking Previous Research to the Themes

#### Feelings of Discouragement

The themes that were identified as a result of the focus group connect to the literature and inform research about the experiences of students finding a sense of belonging. The first theme that links to previous research is the theme of feelings of discouragement. Feelings of discouragement are the reason Black males often disengage in their collegiate environments. The feelings of discouragement identified in this study are described in other studies as the reasons Black males fail in college or do not enroll. Graham (2022) found four different reasons Black males do not enroll in college, and two of the four resonate with the theme of feelings of discouragement. She says there is a lack of role models in education, and it is difficult for Black males to find other students, faculty, and administration who look like them. The nonexistent shared cultural worldview and the lack or shortage of Black teachers causes isolation at PWIs. Graham also refers to the racial hostility toward Black men. The microaggressions, followed by racially motivated incidents, cause Black males to have feelings of discouragement.

PWI racism is a huge factor in causing Black males to feel discouraged. Strayhorn (2012) contends that “encountering negative experiences such as discrimination and racism tended to reduce, if not eliminate, Black males’ sense of connectedness on campus” (p. 87). Racist environments add to the feelings of discouragement. Dulabaum (2016) studied the barriers to academic success and used qualitative methods to examine specific issues for Black males. Dulabaum addressed the specific issues of stereotype threat, discrimination from White peers and faculty, disconnection from the campus climate, staff, and the need for a supportive community of friends and staff that cause a lack of engagement, pushing toward feelings of discouragement.

There are consistent barriers that influence the feelings of discouragement Black males face. Gavins (2009) contended those barriers are due to societally racist practices, budget issues within programming to appeal to Black males, and membership of different social groups. Gavins (2009) also identified the racial inequalities and the lack of representation in higher education spaces. Brooms and Davis (2017) examined the lack of representation, which also leads to isolation on college campuses as well as the targeting of Black males. Brooms and Davis (2017) identified that the lack of representation on campus is the primary reason Black males’ presence on campus is scrutinized. In connection with the themes in this research, when Black males feel isolated, they search for connectedness to succeed. Research shows that Black males’ feelings of discouragement remain a theme within higher education. The theme of feelings of discouragement is linked to previous research (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Dulabaum, 2016; Gavins, 2009; Graham, 2022; Strayhorn, 2012) through code switching, peer judgment, racial disparities, isolation, and lack of representation in the college environment.

In a Detroit newsletter Gill (2021) says, code-switching is more complex and is often taxing for Black people. Based on the signs of relief the participants demonstrated. When participants realized, they did not need to code switch in the Barbershop Talk Experience, it was noticeable that they felt a sense of freedom to be themselves and communicate in a familiar way of comfort. Harper (2015) speaks to the racial injustices that Black males face. He mentioned Black males being considered as rude and disrespectful as well as accused of academic misconduct all directed towards them from White faculty and staff. Racially motivated actions and responses to Black males encourage the discouragement that they feel on PWIs. In connection of isolation and lack of representation Beale et.al. (2019) says Mentorship for Black males is crucial because of the small amount of positive Black male connections, they say this causes fears of going extreme with behavior and the inability to connect with peers and difficulty succeeding in college and within the workforce.

### Feelings of Belonging

Feelings of belonging were seen throughout the focus group. Research shows administration and faculty representation, mentorship groups, and peer-to-peer engagement encourage a sense of belonging. Baumeister and Leary (1995) acknowledged that for people to fulfill the human core desire of belonging, a feeling of connectedness is necessary within their communities. According to Ostrove (2003), how individuals engage in and react to social settings shows the impact and connection of sense of belonging. Akbar (1991) contends that Black males find themselves searching for relationships involving role models, mentors, teachers, big brothers, and father figures that encourage feelings of belonging. Comfort and connectedness are established based on relationships with one's self (comfort) and with others

(connectedness). This interpretation is in alignment with their feelings of belonging because the participants were eager to feel comfortable and were excited to connect with their peers and Black administrators. Broome and Davis (2017) argue, “The concept of belonging becomes the key to a person’s sense of self and the feeling that his or her efforts are valued” (p. 21). Feelings of belonging is a valued factor within the research. Strayhorn (2012) and Maslow (1943) noted the importance of the hierarchy of needs and asserted that a sense of belonging is a basic human need. The desire for comfort and connectedness revealed a sense of belonging in for the participants due to their effort in sharing their stories. The Barbershop Talk Experiences were based on the narratives they shared in the cultivated space.

### Processing Belonging

In connection to the existing research, Allen (2019) contends that a sense of belonging is independent of participation in and proximity to other people and that belonging comes from perception of quality, meaning, and satisfaction within relationships. She believes belonging is not limited to human interactions but also to places and events. Allen speaks to the unique individual nature of belonging and how it affects people differently and notes that processing belonging can be a task in and of itself. The participants were processing from the start of the program to the very end. According to Allen, being in a space with people who look like you is not enough to establish legitimate belonging. There must be a point of connection within a space individual are communicating in to cause the feeling of connectedness or sense of belonging.



## Research Questions Answered

Research Question 1: To what extent do Black male undergraduate students attending PWIs feel a sense of belonging before attending Barbershop Talks?

According to the responses, the participants they felt they belonged at the university, but they did not feel they had the connections with their peers, which implies that they did not have a sense of belonging with a deeper meaning within their community of Black males.

Research Question 2: To what extent do Black male undergraduate students attending PWIs feel a sense of belonging after attending Barbershop Talks?

Six of the nine participants in the Barbershop Talk Experience focus group said they felt a feeling of connectedness. This indicates that their sense of belonging increased as a result of their newfound connections.

Research Question 3: How do Black male undergraduate students express their sense of belonging at their PWI?

According to the Barbershop Talk Experience focus group data, taking initiative to gather is the first step, and sense of belonging is expressed when Black males engage in community through conversation. The need to code switch was nonexistent, and the Black males felt they could be themselves and create connections through their commonalities.

Research Question 4: How do Black male undergraduate students think Barbershop Talks will influence their sense of belonging at their PWI?

Based on the data collected in the focus group, six of the nine Black males also mentioned or displayed nonverbal actions in the form of head nods when asked if they saw a change within themselves after the Barbershop Talk. The notice of change they experienced

shows they were influenced by the experience and all nine participants expressed interest in making the Barbershop Talks Experiences a weekly meeting.

Research Question 5 Is the Barbershop Talks Experience a promising way to increase Black male students' sense of belonging at PWIs?

From the data observed in the Barbershop Talk Experience, all nine participants wanted to attend the experience weekly, and seven said the Barbershop Talk Experience made them feel like they belonged. While one participant said he already had a sense of belonging, another mentioned that it was not being a question of does he belong but where does he belong in the institution. The Barbershop Talk Experience is a promising way to increase Black male students' sense of belonging at PWIs.

## Discussion

### Promise of Barbershop Talks

The Barbershop Talk Experience promises to continue to make an impact by creating spaces and mobile pockets of belonging for Black males in predominantly White spaces. The promise of the Barbershop Talk Experience is to maintain its integrity and voice representing marginalized students who feel isolated and are searching for a place to belong. The Barbershop Talk Experience will continue to provide a space for Black males to belong on every campus.

### Challenge of Implementing Barbershop Talks

Although the goal of the Barbershop Talk Experience is to exist at every PWI in the country, I recognize the challenge that come with obtaining access to colleges and universities. Months of preparation and meetings are required to make sure the Barbershop Talk Experience is

the right fit for each institution. Given the current political climate and refusal to accept critical race theory, the anticipation of challenge is relevant.

Another challenge that may be faced when implementing barbershop talks at different institutions is the anticipated crowd that organically cannot be controlled. Having to rely on the college campus requesting the Barbershop Talk Experience to recruit participants is also a difficult and uncertain task. Building authentic relationships with other campus partners also can be cumbersome. The biggest perceived challenge is recreation of the experience and having Black university faculty and staff commit to being present on top of their existing workloads.

Both institutions involved in this study are rooted in white cultural norms. There is a difference within the demographics of the institution where the Barbershop talks was created compared to where the institution the barbershop talk was piloted. Both institutions service a small percentage of Black students. The institution where the Barbershop Talks were created has 16,769 enrolled in which 10,472 are undergraduate and out of the undergraduates being serviced 2,139 are Black and less than half of the 2139 students are Black males. The institution where the barbershop talk was piloted with the BTE and focus group has 52,679 students enrolled with 32,107 being undergraduate students and 2,085 of those students being Black. The institution of Barbershop Talk origin is a smaller institution, but has more Black males enrolled which can affect the sense of belonging experiences because there are more Black males enrolled. Another difference between the two institutions is that the Barbershop Talk Experience is a consistent outlet for Black males to communicate and assess their belonging through consistent conversation and connections with one another. The institution of origin for Barbershop Talks hosts consistent Barbershop Talk Experiences monthly while the larger pilot institution does not.

From the qualitative data it is evident that Black males at the larger institution desire connectedness and community. The Barbershop Talk Experience created an authentic opportunity for the participants to create community, based on their interest and desire to belong. With both institutions having similar percentages of Black males, the example of the Barbershop Talks Experience at the larger institution, along with the desire for those student participants to continue the Barbershop Talk Experience, demonstrates the importance and significance of Black males creating a sense of belonging. Sense of belonging impacts student connections to the university, their peers and their academics.

#### Limitations

There were several limitations in this study of a pilot program of the Barbershop Talks Experience. First, the location of this pilot study and the origin location of BTE were both PWIs in the Midwest United States. Future studies should organize BTE at other types of institutions, such as community colleges and universities and colleges in other parts of the United States. Second, there was no comparison group of students who did not participate in BTE. Future research should hear about sense of belonging and campus encounters from Black male students both participating in BTE and Black Male Initiative programs and compare them to the voices of Black male students not involved in these programs.

#### Future Direction

The Barbershop Talks Experience has helped individuals to create a sense of belonging for themselves. In the future I would like to expand the reach of BTE and of the research on this topic in order to improve the experiences of Black males in higher education around the country.

I would like to help create Barbershop Talk Experiences at community colleges across the country, as well as at Historically Black Colleges and Universities to learn the differences when participants are already immersed in Black culture. Future research in diverse locations could show whether the themes that emerged in this study are like what Black males elsewhere experience. In the future I hope that Barbershop Talk Experiences can influence internal spaces and places of belonging where Black males can feel connected everywhere they go.

### Conclusion

Historical approaches for Black males show deficits in helping them feel they belong in educational spaces, specifically in higher education. This study demonstrates that interventions in the form of Barbershop Talks can be created to cultivate a sense of belonging in higher education, particularly at PWIs, for Black males. This research resonates with me as the researcher because I have spent my entire educational career searching to find my space and place in collegiate environments that have teeter-tottered between being toxic and healthy. From this research, I was able to observe versions of myself in a multitude of ways, and I am transformed because of it.

Black males need spaces they can call their own with people they trust as they navigate their PWI experiences. This study shows a correlation between persistence and high sense of belonging. This study also shows us that Black males are aware of belonging, and it is not so much about whether they belong, but where they belong in the space they have worked hard to gain access to. Belonging for Black males at PWIs is more than being accepted in a place, it is about finding your space in that place. Black males will persist if they dwell in community.

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APPENDIX

VARIABLE SUBSCALES AND ITEMS

## Variable Subscales and Items

Subscale	Items
Relatedness Satisfaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I feel connected with my friends at my college.</li> <li>2. I experience a warm feeling with the students and teachers I spend time with.</li> </ol>
Relatedness Frustration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I feel excluded from the group of students I want to belong to.</li> <li>2. I feel that teachers and students are cold and distant toward me.</li> </ol>
Support services satisfactions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How satisfied are you with the academic advising you receive here?</li> <li>2. How well does this institution communicate important information to students such as academic rules, degree requirements, individual course requirements, campus news and events, extracurricular activities, tuition cost, and financial aid and scholarship opportunities?</li> <li>3. How easy is it to get answers to your questions about things related to your education here?</li> <li>4. How much input do you think you can have on matters such as course offerings, rules and regulations, and registration procedures?</li> <li>5. If you have needs that are different from the majority of students here, how well does this university meet these needs?</li> <li>6. How fairly do you think students are handled here?</li> </ol>
Academic integration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How well do you understand the thinking of your instructors when they lecture or ask students to answer question in class?</li> <li>2. How satisfied are you with the extent of your intellectual growth and interest in ideas since coming here?</li> <li>3. In general, how satisfied are you with the quality of instruction you are receiving here?</li> <li>4. How concerned are faculty here about your intellectual growth?</li> <li>5. On average across all your courses, how interested are you in the things that are being said during class discussion?</li> <li>6. How much of a connection do you see between what you are learning here and your future career possibilities?</li> <li>7. I believe that many instructors deliberately impose unreasonable requirements on students and enjoy their distress.</li> <li>8. Students differ widely in how much interaction they want to have with faculty. How disappointed are you in the amount of interaction you have?</li> </ol>



Subscale	Items
Social integration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How much have your interpersonal relationships with other students had an impact on your personal growth, attitudes, and values?</li> <li>2. How much have your interpersonal relationships with other students had an impact on your intellectual growth and interest in ideas?</li> <li>3. How strong is your sense of connectedness with other faculty, students, staff on campus?</li> <li>4. How much do you think you have in common with other students here?</li> <li>5. When you think about your overall social life here (friendships, college organizations, extracurricular activities, and so on), how satisfied are you with yours?</li> <li>6. How many of your closest friends are here in college with you rather than elsewhere such as other colleges, work, or hometown?</li> <li>7. What is your overall impression of the other students here?</li> <li>8. How often do you wear clothing with this college's emblems?</li> </ol>
Degree commitment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When you think of the people who mean the most to you (such as friends and family), how disappointed do you think they would be if you quit school?</li> <li>2. At this moment in time, how certain are you that you will earn a college degree?</li> <li>3. At this time, how strong is your commitment to earning a college degree, here or elsewhere?</li> <li>4. How strong is your intention to persist in your pursuit of the degree, here or elsewhere?</li> <li>5. How supportive is your family of your pursuit of a college degree, in terms of their encouragement and expectations?</li> </ol>
Institutional commitment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How likely is it that you will earn a degree from here?</li> <li>2. How confident are you that this is the right university for you?</li> <li>3. How likely is it that you will re-enroll here next semester?</li> <li>4. How much thought have you given to stopping your education here, and perhaps transferring to another college, going to work, or leaving for other reasons?</li> </ol>
Academic conscientiousness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How often do you miss class for reasons other than illness or participation in school-sponsored activities?</li> <li>2. How often do you turn in assignments past the due date?</li> <li>3. I am disinterested in academic work and do as little as possible.</li> </ol>