

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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The Graduate School

Morehead State University

April 9, 2019

THEIR PERCEPTIONS: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN AFRICAN  
AMERICAN MALE INITIATIVES AT TWO PREDOMINANTLY WHITE  
INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract of Capstone

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the  
College of Education  
At Morehead State University

By

Robert De'Andre Sparks

Shelby, Mississippi

Committee Chair: Fajuan Tan, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

April 9, 2019

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## ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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AMERICAN MALE INITIATIVES AT TWO PREDOMINANTLY WHITE  
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In conducting this phenomenological study, a qualitative research method was used to gather the feedback African American males about their perceptions as participants in African American male initiatives (AAMI) at two predominantly White institutions in University System of Georgia. Since African American males are increasingly attending colleges and universities, it is important for these institutions to provide institutional support to ensure these students' persistence, retention, and graduate from college. This study explored the perceptions of participants in AAMI to provide feedback for institutions that support African American male students. The research yielded results showing how the AAMI members' college experience affected the participants' perception of the institutions as well as the AAMI.

As stated in the literature, predominantly White institutions are challenging for African American males. These students do not feel connected to institutions, however, the AAMI allowed members to feel valued while in college. Several themes emerged during the interviews: 1) networking, 2) the structure of the AAMI, 3) sense of belonging, 4) relationships with peers, faculty and staff, 5) the commitment of the program directors, and 6) the development of time management skills. The findings suggested that these relationships in the AAMI assisted participants in navigating their collegiate journeys beginning with their first year.

Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure were theoretical frameworks used to highlight the perceptions of the AAMI participants.

KEYWORDS: African American male initiatives/program, Mentoring, Persistence, Retention, Black or African American

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Candidate Signature

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Date

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CAPSTONE

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DEDICATION

To Idella Sanders Haywood, Ruby Inez Sparks, Sharon Denise Sparks, Mary Alice Reed and Wendy Renee Reed.

With God, all things are possible if we believe.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge God who continues to bless me even though I am imperfect. To my two mothers, my birth mother, Sharon Sparks, thank you for showing me to love myself unconditionally, and my adopted mother, Wendy Reed thank you for choosing me and loving me categorically. This would have not been possible without your love and support. To my siblings, Shuntrice, Michelin, and Larry, I am thankful to have each of you in my life. Your children bring me so much joy and I am thankful to be an uncle because of each of you.

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To my mentees, thanks for challenging me to be a better person. I am forever reminded by my motto: “Remain teachable, so you will always be able to teach others.” -Dr. Robert De’Andre Sparks

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background of the Problem**

According to Schott (2012), the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that 60% of future careers would require formal education credentials (as cited in Hall, 2017, p. 53). Likewise, Thomas-Hill and Boes (2013) revealed that college graduates earn more than one million dollars over their forty-year careers than those with a high school diploma. Therefore, the level of education an individual possessed directly impacted their possible earnings. The achievement of a college degree is vital to the success of African American male students. Some researchers acknowledged that a college degree is a public good through which individual participation accumulates benefits for the larger society (Harper, Patton, and Woodren, 2009; Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005; Lewis & Hearn, 2003). Subsequently, increasing the number of African American male graduates directly affects the economy. Failure to increase the number of Black male graduates from colleges and universities has led to, “a) diminished long-term wealth accumulation; (b) greater income disparity among race and/also education level; and (c) diminishing of the nation’s overall intellectual capital and global competitiveness” (Hall, 2017, p. 53).

Brooms (2016) acknowledged persistence discrepancies exist among African American male students’ retention and graduation rates. Hall (2017) described the challenges African Americans face on college campuses related to support and

student involvement. Strayhorn (2008) found that predominantly White institutions are less supportive and inviting for African American students. According to Harper (2012), Hall (2017), and Brooms (2016), only 39.5% of African Americans graduated in six years from four-year institutions, compared to 61.5% of their White peers. Since African Americans graduate at lower rates than their White counterparts, retention and graduation practices are a new area of research for higher education institutions. Moreover, the increase in the number of African Americans attending colleges and universities demonstrates the imperativeness of ensuring these students graduate from college at the same rate as their White counterparts (Thomas-Hill & Boes, 2013).

Throughout the United States, colleges and universities have begun to look at graduation rates differently: currently, some states and the federal government use data from institutions' persistence, retention, and graduation rates to release government funding (Thomas-Hill & Boes, 2013). Since graduation rates are viewed as a substantial measure of success for institutions, more resources are necessary for African American males who attend predominantly White institutions, as research indicated that African American males graduate at a lower rate than their White and same-race female counterparts at all levels (Hall, 2017; Harper, 2013). Researchers such as Cuyjet (2006), Dancy (2012), Harper (2013), and Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) identified lack of positive institutional support as a factor in the number of postsecondary degrees awarded to African American males.



According to Toldson (2012), although higher education enrollment rates for Black males are proportionate to the adult Black male population, degree attainment rates are not proportionate (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Tinto (1993) noted institutions of higher education must recruit, retain, and graduate students. To assist in the college completion of Black males, colleges and universities began to develop mentoring initiatives. In addition, higher education professionals developed programs, orientations, campus organizations, and leadership groups to assist students in navigating the campus environment (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

Although the mentoring initiatives have been used to support college completion, there are still barriers that African American males face. Kim and Hargrove (2013) further elaborated on the critical role of institutions as providers of the necessary resources, programs, and services deemed essential to create an atmosphere conducive to student development and success. According to Strayhorn and Terrell (2007), mentoring enables students' academic and social involvement while in college: "Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that mentoring may influence an individual's satisfaction with college. To the extent, this is true; mentoring would directly or indirectly influence a student's intentions, and consequently, persistence/retention decisions" (Blount, 2011, p. 73). Additionally, peer support is a great indicator of success for African American males (Harper, 2012). Strayhorn (2008) acknowledged that African American males who develop relationships with faculty, staff, and their peers are more likely to have a positive perception of their institution and graduate from college. The need for mentoring initiatives is seen as an

essential component for African American students (Dahlvig, 2010). According to Dahlvig (2010), mentoring can be a multifaceted relationship that contributes to the career advancement, personal support, role modeling, and advocacy of African American students. Further, mentoring initiatives provide support to African American males, which contributes to their academic success, retention, and graduation rates (Dahlvig, 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Hall (2017), African American male undergraduate students continue to trail behind their White peers in graduation rates. To ensure the success of students, institutions created initiatives to support the persistence and retention of African American male students. These institutional resources and supports were used to matriculate students through college. According to the U.S. Department of Education, African American males have the lowest retention and graduation rates compared to females and other ethnic groups (Simmons, 2013). Since predominantly White institutions are less inviting to African American students, mentoring allows students to feel more connected to the institutions (Hall, 2017). African American males comprise only 4.3% of all undergraduate students in the United States (Strayhorn, 2010). The literature showed that students involved on campus academically and socially have a higher percentage to graduate.

This study highlighted the perceptions of African American males who participated in institution-supported African American male initiatives. The University

System of Georgia's system-wide African American male initiative is significant because it has increased the number of students who graduated from college and universities within the system (USG, 2016). However, little research highlighted the perceptions of the African American male initiative participants. This study examined the perspectives of African American male students that participated in two AAMI.

The researcher identified the reasons some African American male students do not graduate from college. The literature review provided in Chapter Two offers more insight on the importance of supporting this traditionally underrepresented group of students, who can perform well at predominantly White institutions, with support from the institution (Strayhorn, 2014). It is imperative that institutions of higher learning provide institutional support to increase the persistence, retention and graduation rates of African American males (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

African American male initiatives implemented at colleges and universities support the persistence, retention, and graduation rates of African American male students. Still, there is limited research using Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure as theoretical frameworks to highlight the perceptions of African American male initiative participants. The purpose of this study was to highlight the perceptions of African American males who are participating in African American male initiatives at two regional comprehensive predominantly White institutions in the University System of Georgia. This qualitative phenomenological study will add to current literature on the

perceptions of African American males participating in African American male initiatives.

### **Research Questions**

This research highlighted the perceptions of African American male students participating in two AAMI. The findings in this study can provide feedback to universities to continue to support the persistence and retention efforts of African American male students. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What were the perceptions of African American males who participated in African American Male Initiatives at two predominantly White institutions in the University System of Georgia?
2. What impact did participation in African American male initiatives have on African American male persistence in college?

### **Study Design Overview**

This study focused on the perceptions of participants who participated in two African American male initiatives. According to Creswell (2014), some authors convey the characteristics of a qualitative phenomenological as, “qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants” (Creswell, 2014, p.175). This study highlighted the lived experiences of the students who participated in the African American male initiative. The data collected identified common themes from face-to-face interviews. For this study, it was important to understand the impact and

perception of the African American males and their lived experiences participating in the mentoring initiative. The researcher recruited participants of this study with the assistance of the respective program directors. The twelve participants for this study were active members of the African American male initiative. There were three steps the researcher used to collect data: 1) interviews, 2) interview transcription, and 3) coding for themes. As Creswell (2014) noted, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with participants, and the interviews are unstructured with open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were used to gather more insight from the views and opinions of the participants.

### **Definition of Terminology**

**African American male initiatives/ program (AAMI)** - A statewide program used to increase the amount of African American males who graduate from college (University System of Georgia, 2017).

**Black or African American** - A student of Black or African American descent.

**Cohort** - A group of students, who participated in the AAMI.

**Formal mentoring** - A structured relationship typically assigned by an organization and guides the protégé/mentee from the mentor (Ragins & Cotton,1999).

**Informal mentoring** - An unstructured relationship in which the mentor and protégé/mentee both select each other. These relationships are developed by mutual identification and fulfillment (Ragins & Cotton,1999).

**Mentor** - A person who sponsors, guides, and develops another person's growth and development (McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchmann, & Shwed, 2011).

**Mentoring** - According to Barker (2007) and Spence (2007), mentoring is the multifaceted relationship that contributes to career advancement, personal support, role modeling, and advocacy (as cited in Dahlvig, 2010).

**Persistence** - The likelihood that a student will return year to year (Tinto, 1998).

**Predominantly White Institution** - An institution with White student enrollment of more than 50%.

**Retention** - The condition of keeping, with focuses on maintaining several factors including a welcoming environment, high member morale, and organizational processes (Tinto, 1998).

**Underrepresented students** - Refers to racial and ethnic populations that are disproportionately represented in higher education.

### **Summary**

This capstone is comprised of five chapters. Chapter One highlighted the importance of mentoring African American male students who attended predominantly White institutions. It reviewed the impact of the African American male initiatives on the students' persistence in college. Chapter Two examines literature about African American male students, their persistence, and the need for African American male initiatives to support graduation rates at predominantly White institutions. Chapter Three explains the research methodology, participants, data

collection, and analysis. Chapter Four presents the results from the interviews. Finally, Chapter Five offers discussion, recommendations, and conclusions.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **African American Male Students**

To decrease the achievement gap of African American male students over the last 15 years, colleges and universities have improved institutional efforts to graduate their students (Brooms, 2016). In higher education, the campus climate, as well as academic and social integrations, are critical in supporting student success. As a result of the number of challenges facing African American males, as Brooms (2016) noted, more research on the experiences of students in the Black male initiatives is needed. According to the U.S. Department of Education, more than two-thirds of all African American men who enter college leave before earning a college degree (Sinanan, 2016). Several researchers (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008) investigated the achievement gaps facing African American males and identified specific challenges that negatively impact their experiences while in college (as cited in Sinanan, 2016). Many Black males feel unwelcomed on college campuses (Strayhorn, 2014), so creating a sense of belonging to support these students through their academic journey is critical (Sinanan, 2016). Sinanan (2012) reviewed how the perceptions and experiences of African American males at predominantly White institutions significantly affected the learning experience of these students. Likewise, MacKay and Kuh (1994) found that African American students who participated in a mentoring program that addressed



existing social and environmental concerns had higher retention rates of students (Sinanan, 2016).

### **African American Student Persistence**

The persistence of African American male students has been a concern within higher education for many years. According to Allen (2013), students who are better prepared academically for college have a greater chance of graduating. There are many students who do not have the tools and skills needed to be successful in college. For example, African American males often lack the necessary support from family and are academically less prepared for college than their counterparts (Harper, 2012). Although African Americans are 20% less likely to persist in college than White students (Allen, 2013), the mentoring experience of African American students at predominantly White institutions has directly impacted the persistence and graduation rates of those students (Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2016). Higher education historically has had little representation of minority students, specifically African American students. While mentoring initiatives have been essential to students' persistence in college, students are encouraged to participate in different student organizations, as well as to cultivate their mentoring relationships (Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2016). Students who are involved in student organizations on college and university campuses have a higher percentage to persistence because of their connection to the institution (Strayhorn, 2014).

### **Resilience**

Persistence increases when students are involved with student organizations and campus resources. African American males throughout their college experience have shown resilience through their persistence. Many African American males encounter negative stereotypes that exist in American society and culture (Cuyjet, 2006). To effectively assist African American males, it is important to understand their socio-cultural characteristics, as well as their challenges and needs (Cuyjet, 2006). Resources from institutional programs, peers, and family relationships allow African American males to garner social capital in support of the student's academic goals (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Students who have their end-goal in mind, which should be graduation, can push themselves forward with support from the institutions, such as mentoring initiatives.

Professors and administrators should be accessible and display a willingness to form supportive relationships with students. These relationships encourage persistence because the students realize that professors and administrators care about them and their success at the institution (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). The resilience of African American males is even more important since, according to Jones and Williams (2006), colleges and universities are dependent on tuition as a source of revenue, and financial barriers affect the attendance of students. Students having resilience through college with their persistence is connected to student support services and a sense of belonging to the institution.

### **Sense of Belonging**

The resilience of a student is created when they feel a sense of belonging to the institution:

“In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers” (Strayhorn, 2012, p.4).

As a member of the campus community, students should feel connected.

According to Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007), a sense of belonging is the result of social and academic integration. Further, the sense of belonging comes directly from the campus climate and the students’ daily interactions with peers, faculty, and staff members (Strayhorn, 2014). Marable (2003) wrote,

“the cultural history of Blacks in the United States consists of the struggle to maintain their own group’s sense of identity, social cohesion, and integrity in the face of policies which have been designed to deny their common humanity and particularity” (as cited in Sinanan, 2016, p. 156).

Understanding the campus culture as well as trying to navigate college is challenging for African Americans students. According to Sinanan (2016), African American students experience a multitude of problems on campuses, ranging from microaggressions to institutional racism. However, students who gain membership in student organizations and become part of the campus community increase their

resilience and sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is critical to peers, classroom, and on-campus college experiences (Strayhorn, 2012).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Tinto's student departure and Astin's student involvement theories were used in the theoretical framework of this study. Higher education provides developmental programs and services for the academic and non-academic parts of students' involvement on campus. These assist students in matriculating through college and address student retention and persistence in college.

Both theories include student involvement and academic engagement as key factors in student success in college. The theories use the campus environment as a whole to reflect on the student's perception of the institution. Additionally, the theories look at structured student support at institutions based on the needs of the student population. This part of the literature review highlights these student retention and persistence theories in relation to how they support African American male students to ensure their academic and personal success in college.

### **Tinto: Student Departure Theory**

Tinto (1987) noted that, "eventual persistence requires that individuals make the transition to college and become incorporated into the ongoing social and intellectual life of the college" (p.126). Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) defined "integration" as the,

"extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal

structural requirements for membership in that community or in the subgroups of which the individual is a part” (p.53).

Colleges and universities are made up of both academic and social systems that have formal and informal structures. Tinto’s (1975, 1987) student departure theory incorporated six components:

1. Pre-entry attributes (prior schooling and family background);
2. Goals/commitment (student aspirations and institutional goals);
3. Institutional experiences (academics, faculty interaction, co-curricular involvement, and peer group interaction);
4. Integration (academic and social);
5. Goals/commitment (intentions and external commitments); and
6. Outcome (departure decision— graduate, transfer, dropout) (as cited in Metz, 2004, p. 192).

Tinto stated students arrive at college with specific experiences and aspirations (Metz, 2004). Tinto (1987, 1993) suggested there is a correlation between the institution’s environment and the students’ persistence, resistance, and commitment to the institution. The integration into the college environment affects students’ ability to attain a college degree. Tinto (1987) stated academic integration is what occurs during the formal educational (such as the classroom and interactions with faculty), while social integration occurs in the informal settings (such as outside of the classroom, interactions and engagement with staff and peers). Tinto’s research

suggested students who are integrated into college have a higher percentage of completing college.

### **Astin: Theory of Student Involvement**

Astin's student involvement theory emerged from Tinto's student departure theory (Astin, 1984). According to Astin (1984), student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to the academic experience. When students enter a college campus, they should feel connected to the campus. Connections start from relationships with peers and faculty, through extracurricular involvement, and even living in a residence hall (Astin, 1984). Astin's method examined persistence and connected retention and graduation rates to student involvement by using the input-environment outcome (IEO) model. Astin's (1985) research found that a student's involvement on campus contributed to the student remaining in college, whereas a lack of involvement contributed to the student's departure.

This theory had five basic postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).
2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).
4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement (Astin, 1985, p. 519).

Astin's model used the IEO model to determine if students would depart. Astin examined the role student involvement played in the persistence of students. Throughout Astin's research, student involvement was noted as a vital aspect of the student experience and persistence in college.

### **Historical Evolution of Mentoring**

The story of Mentor goes back to the ancient Greek *Odyssey*. Odysseus, King of Ithaca, fought in the Trojan War and entrusted the care of his household to Mentor, who served as a friend, role model, and paternal guide for Odysseus' son, Telemachus (Fox, 2006). Odysseus did not think the Trojan War would last ten years, and during this time Odysseus was prohibited from returning home. Mentor was to act as a

surrogate parent in the King's absence (Fox, 2006). According to Fox (2006), Mentor had such a tremendous influence on Telemachus through his guidance and tutoring, and it is through Greek mythology that we ascribe the term, "mentor" to a process or an older person who helps facilitate the growth and development of a younger, inexperienced individual (Fox, 2006). The literature as it refers to mentors has evolved. For example, Mentor is referred to as a wise and kindly elder, a surrogate parent, an educator, and guide (Fox, 2006). The mentorship between Telemachus and Mentor was based on personal investment and the development of deep mutual respect and affection for one another (Fox, 2006).

Previous research examined mentoring roles in higher education as it relates to African American male students at predominantly White institutions (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Shandely (1989) described mentoring from a higher education perspective as an intentional process involving the interaction of two or more individuals (as cited in LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997, p. 44). At colleges and universities, mentoring initiatives have different structures and formats. Today, mentoring initiatives are normally structured programs, which are used to foster the development of a student. As LaVant et al. (1997) stated, mentoring relationships are insightful, which is often supportive and requires the mentor to apply wisdom to the protégé.

### **Higher Education Mentoring**

Mentoring programs assist colleges and universities with their retention and persistence efforts. According to Brooms (2016), the focus on increasing the



retention and success of Black male students has increased specifically at predominantly White institutions. Mentoring programs such as the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) and Brother2Brother (B2B) focus on the retention and success of Black male students (Brooms, 2016). Programs like SAAB started in the 1990s and began to form on predominantly White institutions across the United States (Brooms, 2016). SAAB has chapters that are individualized to meet the needs of each student on their campus (Brooms, 2016). The focus of the SAAB model, according to Bledsoe and Rome (cited by Brooms, 2016), is six basic components: (1) personal development, (2) service, (3) academic, (4) financial affairs, (5) spiritual-enrichment/social, and (6) membership/public relations. Further, Cuyjet (2006) pointed out the need to be intentional when creating these programs: colleges and universities should design programs to ensure a meaningful impact on students' experiences.

There is an increasing number of mentoring programs focused on academically at-risk students and underrepresented students, specifically African American males. A study by Rhodes, Grossman, and Resch (2000) suggested the relationship between mentoring and academic achievement is mediated by improved family relationships, self-worth, and scholastic competence. The development and increased awareness of students by using mentors such as peer-to-peer, faculty, and staff mentoring are vital to mentoring programs:

“Results from several studies on mentoring in higher education (Carter, 1994; Fowler & Muckert, 2004; Pfleeger & Mertz, 1995; Patitu & Terrell, 1997;

Salinitri, 2005; Santos, Reigadas, & Scott, 2000) support the value of mentoring programs in assisting students with their adjustment to college, academic performance, and/or persistence decisions” (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007, p. 71).

The literature reviewed different formats for mentoring programs as well as the effectiveness of the programs. Types of mentoring programs include faculty-to-student mentoring, peer mentoring, and professional-student mentoring (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007).

Previous studies investigated mentor and mentee relationships. Santos and Reigadas (2002) surveyed 32 Latino students who participated in a faculty mentoring program at a state university in California (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). In this study, Santos and Reigadas (2002) found that mentors facilitated their protégés’ personal and social adjustment to college (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). This experience for students of color is significant because many faculty members do not look like students of color, and more specifically are not African American males. Another study done by Salinitri involved a program at a Canadian university, which paired low achieving first-year students with pre-service teachers in the same discipline (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). By connecting students with teachers who could support them in the discipline where they were struggling allowed for students to increase their course grade. The study found 95% of the students stayed enrolled at the college (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007).

The welcoming environment and culture of enrollment at colleges and universities provide students the opportunity to develop academically, personally, and professionally. Students participating in mentorship programs receive emotional support and motivation as they progress through their academic journey. Hoffman & Wallach (2005) contended that minority male students who joined mentoring programs demonstrated higher success rates. Mentoring programs have a net gain and are rewarding as students' and mentors' lives are impacted by life lessons and experiences learned.

There is little research on the relationship between and significance of African American students and faculty. However, interaction with faculty is a critical factor in student retention and persistence (Astin, 1993; Santos & Reigadas, 2004; Terenzini, Rendon, Lee, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Romero, 1994; as cited in Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Therefore, connecting with faculty could have tremendous impact for an African American male and may assist in persistence and graduation. Faculty mentoring can also provide support and direction to students who should make alternative educational choices. Faculty engagement outside of the classroom is significant as well (Tinto, 1998). Students who see faculty at athletic events, student organization events, and in the community tend to have a different perspective of the faculty.

In response to the immediate and pressing issue of African American male students' educational attainment and persistence, effective mentoring is widely viewed as a retention strategy throughout the education community. Addressing

formal and informal mentoring, and how both forms of mentoring can be beneficial to learning and utilizing relationships for African American males, can help these students (Sinanan, 2016). The cultural and community development experiences that involve staff with student organizations encourages growth in mentoring relationships. Since social and personal isolation and lack of belonging appear to be central factors in many African Americans' satisfaction and success at PWIs, engagement is important (Sinanan, 2016).

### **Structure of Informal Mentoring**

On college and university campuses, informal relationships developed by faculty, staff, and students are significant to students' success. Research showed most college students have a mentor, whether informally or formally (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Marchese (2006) found that informal organizational mentoring is more beneficial than formal mentoring because the relationships last longer than with formal mentoring. According to Ragins and Cotton (1999), informal mentoring relationships tend to be more egalitarian, longer lasting, and occur with greater frequency than formal mentoring. Informal mentors are more likely to engage in positive social activities such as counseling, facilitating social interactions, role modeling, and providing friendship (Wanberg et al., 2006).

Informal mentoring is voluntary for both the mentor and the mentee. The relationship lacks structure, and the mentor and the protégé work collectively on the development of the relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Sands, Parson and Duane (1991) stated informal mentees tend to have stronger connections and stronger

relationships with their mentors. This relationship is stronger because informal mentoring is a self-selected relationship between the mentor and mentee (Sands et al., 1991). Both the mentee and the mentor develop the goals by first establishing what type of informal relationship they would like to have. After setting the goals for the relationship, the mentor and mentee are able to develop a meaningful relationship. Additionally, informal mentoring relationships are often endless, thus resulting in the mentorship continuing beyond the mentee's college journey (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). There is little training or support for the mentor as far as creating a relationship with the mentee. However, the voluntary nature of the relationship allows for greater flexibility between both individuals.

### **Structure of Formal Mentoring**

Formal mentoring differs from informal mentoring in several ways. In contrast to informal mentoring, individuals who engage in a formal mentoring relationship are matched as part of an organizational structure development process, and the two individuals must then trust each other for the relationship to strive and grow (Ragins & Cottons, 1999).

Within formal mentoring, the mentor is two to three levels above the mentee (Ragins & Cottons, 1999). The levels allow the protégé to have a sense of role modeling from the mentor. Further, formal mentoring is temporary, because it normally has an end date, whereas informal mentoring can last a lifetime (Ragins & Cottons, 1999). Unlike informal mentoring relationships, a program coordinator or

director reviews an application submission by the potential mentor, and the protégé forms the mentoring relationship (Ragins & Cottons, 1999).

Within higher education, most programs have directors and or coordinators. This individual is responsible for establishing the relationship with both the mentee and the mentor. In the formal mentor relationship structure, sometimes the mentor and the protégé do not know each other. Ragins and Cottons (1999) noted it is reasonable to expect that the psychosocial functions of role modeling, friendship, and counseling may be less with formal mentoring than with informal mentoring relationships. Since relationships are more structured within formal mentoring, it is more challenging for the mentor and protégé to connect. The protégé in a formal relationship may perceive the time spent with the mentor as a commitment to the mentoring program or the organization in which the relationship begins (Ragins & Cottons, 1999). This belief alone is why formal mentoring relationships must be beneficial to both the mentor and the protégé. There are advantages to establishing formal mentoring relationships, including providing mentees with specific goals and outcomes (Sinanan, 2016).

### **African American Male Initiatives**

African American mentoring initiatives and involvement in student organizations enhances sense of belonging among African American males (Strayhorn, 2014). According to Sinanan (2016) mentoring is embedded in the historical and philosophical foundations of African Americans. Tinto's (1997) theory on student departure examined sense of belonging and participation in activities as a

way to retain and matriculate students. In higher education, there are different types of mentoring programs to support college student retention and graduation rates (Brooms, 2016). The engagement in the program allows students to gain a supportive network, specifically among other students, staff, and faculty (Sinanan, 2016). Additionally, each institution develops a specific program for African American male student attending their institutions (Brooks, Jones & Burt, 2013). Each campus group is instrumental in facilitating a positive quality experience for the African American college student (Sinanan, 2016). Cuyjet, Harper, and Kuykendall (2012) found that in response to the achievement gap among Black male students, institutions increased programming efforts to include strategic initiatives target Black males (Brooms, Goodman, & Clark, 2015). To ensure the success of Black males in college, institutions should develop mentoring programs (Sinanan, 2016). The methods used to support African American males include mentoring and development to remove some of the barriers African American males face. However, there have not been studies done on the,

“retention programs focusing on African-American male students include the Black Man’s Think Tank (University of Cincinnati), the Student African-American Brotherhood (Georgia Southwestern University), the Black Male Initiative (Texas Southern University), and the Meyerhoff Program (University of Maryland Baltimore County)” (cited in Brooks, Jones & Burt, 2013, p. 210).

### **Summary**

Chapter Two provided an overview of theoretical frameworks associated with student persistence and a summary of the historical evolution of mentoring and mentoring styles and formats. Several studies identified mentoring as a way to increase retention and persistence (Strayhorn, 2014). This research reinforced the need to develop mentoring programs and initiatives for African American students at predominantly White institutions. Meaningful connections with faculty and peers on campus allow students to feel connected to the campus community. In addition, persistence, retention, and graduation rates continue to be a pressing issue facing many college and universities, since funding is tied to student success rates. Therefore, it is essential to look at African American male initiatives and the perceptions of their benefits to add to the research on mentoring initiatives for this population. This study sought to shed light on the experiences students have while in the programs.



### **Chapter III**

#### **Methodology**

This qualitative phenomenological study highlighted the perceptions of twelve participants in two African American male initiatives at two comprehensive institutions located in the state of Georgia. Six participants were selected at each institution. The experiences of participants in the African American male initiative were used to describe their perception of their institution and the AAMI. This study intended to contribute to the existing literature on AAMIs. This chapter describes the methodical, research questions, target institutions, instrumentation, and methods used to collect the data.

#### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research method to gather data on African American males' perceptions as participants in targeted initiatives at two predominantly White institutions in the University System of Georgia. The qualitative method was the best choice because it allowed the researcher to use a broad approach to understand how African American males interpreted their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study intended to gain a deeper understanding of the events, roles, groups, and interactions of twelve African American male students. According to Seidman (2006), qualitative interviewing covers a wide range of activities and incorporates life history and in-depth accounts of past experiences. Phenomenological interviewing involves conducting a series of interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2006). The interview questions were

open-ended to allow the participants to build upon their experiences. The open-ended approach allowed the researcher to examine the experiences of the students at their respective institutions. During the interviews, participants recalled details of their experiences within African American male initiatives. This process allowed the participants to reflect on their mentoring experiences (Seidman, 2006). The interviews provided additional information regarding the interactions the participants had with others, such as (faculty, staff, and students). Additionally, the interviews relied on the participants' reflections of their experiences as African American male initiative participants (Seidman, 2006). This phenomenological study allowed the researcher to gather first-hand information from the students who are in the program. The researcher selected the two institutions for this study from the University System of Georgia. The institutions are both public, regional comprehensive institutions, which are aligned with the system-wide African American male initiative. Though both institutions used structured mentoring initiatives, the cultures of the campuses played a key role in how the programs were implemented.

#### **University System of Georgia**

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia is composed of 19 members, five of whom are appointed from the state-at-large, and one from each of the state's 14 congressional districts (University System of Georgia, 2018). The Board elects a chancellor who serves as its chief executive officer and the chief administrative officer of the University System of Georgia (USG) (University System of Georgia, 2018). In 1999, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia

conducted a comprehensive benchmarking study that included the examination of key student performance indicators (University System of Georgia, 2017). The study showed a gap between African American males and White students in retention rates, graduation rates, and the number of degrees conferred (University System of Georgia, 2017).

Established in 2002, the University System of Georgia's African American Male Initiative is a coordinated system-wide effort aimed at increasing the persistence, graduation and matriculation of African American male students (University System of Georgia, 2017). The initiative is designed to support the culture of the institution and is tailored specifically for each campus (University System of Georgia, 2017). Of the 29 USG campuses throughout the state, 26 campuses offer a wide array of services focused on African American males.

### **Target Institutions**

According to USG, there are four public regional comprehensive institutions in the University System of Georgia. The target institutions for this study were two of the four regional comprehensive institutions. These institutions are located near a major metropolitan area in the state of Georgia. African Americans represent 34% enrolled population of students attending USG campuses. To protect the identity, each institution was provided a pseudonym. Below is a brief history of the two institutions selected:

Established in 1906, Western Mountain University (WMU) grew from a district agricultural and mechanical school to a two-year institution, and then to a

four-year college in 1957. The university has a lively residential and online community of more than 12,000 students. A total of 36% of their student body identify as African American. Over the years, the AAMI has proven to be effective in increasing retention, persistence, graduation rates for African American males. African American males enroll at higher rates, and more of them are retained beyond the first and second years of college. At WMU, the AAMI is a cohort model. The AAMI started in 2002 when the enrollment of new African American male freshmen had increased significantly over the previous years. The goal was to retain and graduate African American males at the university. Through living-learning communities, the institution was able to make the initiative an important priority. Participants were selected in groups of 25 per academic year. The participants continued throughout their first year, and some later became mentors in the program called Black Excellent Student of Today (BEST). BEST mentors were used in the AAMI at the institution to support the mentees.

Northwest Valley University (NVU) was founded in 1963 as a junior college. NVU became a four-year institution in 1976, and is the third largest public comprehensive university in the state of Georgia. Boasting an enrollment of more than 21,000 students, 21% of students identify as African American. At NVU, the AAMI was structured around academic classes. Participants of the AAMI were in cohorts of 25 students. Students took courses together at NVU to build supportive networks among one another and to strengthen their brotherhood as they worked together to navigate their freshmen year. As a cohort, students formed study groups,

completed group assignments, and learned effective academic skills from each other. Additionally, students developed critical thinking skills through a variety of activities, projects, and academic discourse designed to broaden their understanding of American history, the English language, and global issues as they related to African-American male development. The program initially started with first-year students, and continues as students are selected to become a member of the Ambassadors group of mentors who support freshman African American males. Upper-class African American male students are encouraged to join other student organizations, which are directly aligned with the diversity office.

### **Participants**

The target population was African American males enrolled in two African American male initiatives. The group of twelve participants, six from each institution, allowed the researcher to gain information related to their lived experiences. To participate in the study, participants met the following criteria:

1. Identify as a Black/African American male
2. Attend one of the two regional comprehensive institutions
3. Be an active participant of the African American male initiative
4. Identify as a mentor or mentee in the African American male initiative

Participants were informed their participation in this study was voluntary and that they could opt out of the study at any time.

### **Data Collection Process**

After the IRB approval was received for this study, the participants were interviewed face-to-face using open-ended questions. With the assistance of the program directors, all participants in the African American male initiative at the two institutions were sent an e-mail with the statement of purpose and the participant consent form. After the participants confirmed their participation, an interview scheduled was put in place. An audio recorder was used to record the interviews. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to identify common experiences and perceptions, based on feedback from the participants. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to feel connected to and comfortable with the researcher.

The interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes. Ten questions were asked during the interviews. The interviews were conducted in the diversity and inclusion center at both institutions, where both African American male initiatives had designated space. The designated space in the centers allowed the participants to feel comfortable in sharing their experiences. Full transcripts from all interviews were sent to each research participant for confirmation within two weeks following the interviews. After interviews were completed, the researcher identified common experiences and perceptions of the research participants. The researcher listened to each interview twice and made notes of frequently used statements and phrases. After listening to the interviews, the researcher printed copies of the transcripts. The transcripts were reviewed a second time for content that explicitly described the lived experiences of the participants. As Creswell (2014) noted, this process of triangulation was used to

validate the data collected and to assist the researcher in identifying themes based on participant responses. As the researcher categorized the feedback, the major and prominent themes emerged, reflected by at least three participants (25%).

### **Data Analysis**

This phenomenological research study examined the perceptions and the experiences of students who participated in two African American male initiatives. After the collection of the data, coding was done using the categorical aggregation of data method (Creswell, Hanson, Plano & Morales, 2007). This method allowed the researcher to examine the twelve interviews for special recurring themes within the data. This process involved seeking a collection of themes from the data and using the relevant major ideas to determine which themes emerged. Since each participant's experience varied, it was vital to gather data that reflected their responses. After the interviews were completed, the researcher organized the phrases and words of the same pattern and used Microsoft Word to organize the data and summarize the themes. Additionally, the researcher used Creswell, et al.'s (2007) qualitative approach to reflect on essential themes that constitute the nature of these lived experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In conducting this study, there were no known ethical issues. The researcher received IRB approval from the university before the study was conducted. Participants of the study were informed about the study and were provided consent forms prior to the interviews. The researcher did attend one of the two institutions in

the study; however, the researcher did not participate in the AAMI. The data were collected from face-to-face interviews, and the researcher did not alter or change any statements or responses. If statements were made that identified individual members of the initiative (such program faculty, staff, peers, and so on), then this information was removed to allow anonymity. According to Creswell (2014), it is imperative to protect participants during all phases of research. The researcher assured the participants their feedback would be kept confidential throughout the process. Each participant was given a pseudonym.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three summarized the research methods and processes used to conduct the study. The chapter also provided a description of the study design, an overview of the qualitative research methods used to collect data, and the benefits of using a qualitative phenomenological design to examine the perceptions of the research participants. This study was designed to highlight the perceptions of twelve African American male students, attending two regional public institutions in the University System of Georgia. A qualitative methodology was used, and the study was approved by the Morehead State University IRB office. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to collect data. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed to identify recurring themes.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

This phenomenological qualitative study examined the perceptions of African American males who participated in an African American male initiative at two predominantly White institutions in the University System of Georgia.

Two research questions guided this study:

1. What were the perceptions of African American males who participated in African American male initiatives at two predominantly White institutions in the University System of Georgia?
2. What impact did participation in African American male initiatives have on African American male persistence in college?

### **Background of the Participants**

A total of twelve males participated in the study. After the statement of purpose and the participant consent forms were sent to the participants in the AAMIs, six students from both institutions agreed to participate in the study. 30 % of the participants in each program participated in the study. The participants and the institutions were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. All twelve participants were residents from the state of Georgia. All participants identified as African American males; the average age of the participants was 20 years of age. Three of the participants were sophomores (25%), and nine of the participants were freshmen (75%). The freshman students were in their second semester of the

academic year. The interviews took place over a two-day span, and 36% of the participants were mentors in a program. Each participant was informed about the program through the initial email that was sent to all freshman African American male students.

**Research Participant One (RP1)** was an 18-year-old African-American male from the largest metropolitan area of Georgia. The participant wanted to attend Northwest Valley University because a family member attended the university. The African American male initiative created a space for the participant to have a sense of belonging. He majored in business management with a minor in marketing. He was a second semester freshman.

**Research Participant Two (RP2)** was a 20-year-old African-American male from a rural town in northwest Georgia. The participant majored in education and was actively involved in the African American male initiative as a mentor in the initiative. The participant was born and raised in Georgia, and his family has four generations of heritage in his hometown. He was a second semester sophomore at Northwest Valley University.

**Research Participant Three (RP3)** was an 18-year-old African-American male from a southeast metropolitan city in Georgia and was a mentee in the AAMI at Northwest Valley University. RP3 was interested in the engineering program at the university. He wanted to become a civil engineer when he graduates from college.

**Research Participant Four (RP4)** was a 19-year-old African-American male from Guam who came to the mainland of the United States when he was in high

school. He was active on campus as a student leader and was a mentor in the AAMI at Northwest Valley University. He majored in biology, and after graduation he wanted to attend medical school in Georgia.

**Research Participant Five (RP5)** was a 20-year-old African-American male sophomore from rural South Georgia. He attended Northwest Valley University because he is about four hours from his hometown and is a mentor. He majored in political science and was on the pre-law track at the university.

**Research Participant Six (RP6)** was an 18-year-old African-American male second semester freshman from a town in Georgia, and a participant in the mentoring initiative at Northwest Valley University. The participant was on a music scholarship at the university. His goal was to graduate and become a band instructor at a high school.

**Research Participant Seven (RP7)** was an 18-year-old African American male who from Georgia. The participant majored in secondary education and was actively involved in the African American male initiative as a mentee. The participant was born and raised in Georgia; he attended Western Mountain University because of the education program.

**Research Participant Eight (RP8)** was an 18-year-old African American male from a rural town in West Georgia. The participant majored in history and mathematics and was actively involved in the African American male initiative as a mentor. The participant was born and raised in Georgia, and was a second semester freshman at Western Mountain University.

**Research Participant Nine (RP9)** was 18-year-old African American male from a rural town in Northeast Georgia. The participant majored in nursing and was actively involved in the African American male initiative as a mentee. The participant discussed many of the members in his family being in the healthcare field as the reason for his major. He was a second semester freshman at Western Mountain University.

**Research Participant Ten (RP10)** was an 18-year-old African American male from a rural town in west Alabama. The participant majored in education and was actively involved in the African American male initiative as a mentee. He was a second semester freshman at Western Mountain University.

**Research Participant Eleven (RP11)** was a 19-year-old African American male from a rural town in South Georgia. The participant majored in criminology and hoped to be a policeman when he is done with college. He was actively involved in the African American male initiative as a mentee. He was a second semester sophomore at Western Mountain University.

**Research Participant Twelve (RP12)** was an 18-year-old African American male from a town in West Georgia. The participant was a second semester freshman majoring in sociology and was actively involved in the African American male initiative as a mentee at Western Mountain University. The participant was born and raised in Africa; however, he and his family moved to the United States when he was ten years old to have a better opportunity.

All twelve participants began discussing their introduction into the AAMI. Participants were from the state of Georgia, and five participants were on the state of Georgia's academic scholarship called the HOPE scholarship, given to students throughout the state who achieved a certain academic GPA and SAT or ACT test score. Though the participants did not understand what the AAMI was at first, their perceptions were heard throughout the interview. The participants were students who were mentors and mentees in their perspective AAMI. The participants desired to give back to the mentoring initiatives as alumni, and wanted to help others to learn and grow throughout their freshman year and matriculate through college as their mentees.

### **Introduction to the AAMI**

The participants began the interview describing how they were introduced to the AAMI. A total of 50 % of the participants were referred to the African American male initiative through official communication from the institution. Current or former AAMI students introduced the other 50% of the participants to the program. Participation was voluntary, so the participants did not have to participate. RP1 and RP2 both heard about the AAMI from the institution. There was an email sent to students who identified as African American males on their applications to be admitted to both universities. With assistance from the enrollment offices, the program directors were able to receive a list of students who identified as African American males. The profiles from the enrollment applications allowed the directors

to contact students before many of them enrolled in classes. Regarding their introduction to the AAMI, here are RP1's and RP2's reflections.

Research Participant One (RP1) stated,

“Well, it started with me receiving an email from AAMI, saying that they accepted me. It sounded interesting, because I had never heard of AAMI before, [African American Male Initiative]. I just wanted to see what it was all about, so I decided to join. I can't remember exactly how it happened, but all I remember is they sent an email out to me letting me know that they've accepted me, or something like that”.

Additionally, Research Participant Two (RP2) was unique in that he transferred from Western Mountain University to Northwest Valley University. As a freshman, he was selected to participate in the AAMI at Western Mountain University. Because of his positive experience with the AAMI at Western Mountain University, he became a member of the AAMI at Northwest Valley University when he transferred and later began as a mentor. RP2 stated,

“Well, my participation with AAMI actually started at the Western Mountain University, the school I was attending ... When I was starting my undergrad career, the program director at the time contacted me, emailed me and then she called me out of the blue over the summer. And I was perplexed because I didn't know who the lady was, and she somehow knew all this information about me. She was like, well, I've been observing your files and I like what I see on there. You seem like an upstanding African American male who

would be great for my program. And so, we just hit it off from there, did the whole AAMI experience my freshman year and I loved it. So then when I transferred to Northwest Valley University, I really wanted to get in good and become one of the mentors. And literally as soon as I started my transfer process, I was already calling the AAMI over there, trying to figure out what necessary steps I needed to take to become a mentor”.

Unlike RP1 and RP2, there were some students who did not engage with the director of the AAMI before their arrival to campus. There were some participants who stated they were informed by former and current students who were involved with the AAMI. While on campus one day, Research Participant Five (RP5) stated,

“My freshman year I wasn’t really involved on campus. However, I was in a play and there was a guy who came to the play. He was an ambassador for AAMI at the time. And after seeing me in the play, he saw me on campus. In fact, he had said something to me on campus before that. He saw a sweatshirt I had on. He liked it, and he just gave me a comment on that. But other than that, we hadn’t interacted until he saw me in the play, and he was like, hey man you seem like a great dude and stuff, I really liked you in the play. I’d love to put you in AAMI group chat discuss AAMI, sit down and talk. And I’m not going to lie, at first, I wasn’t thinking like about ... I’m just thinking about me, so I had my few friends on campus, I was like, I’m cool. I don’t know why this dude wants to go eat and stuff. He kept reaching out, and I was like, Cool, I just kept saying, if I’m free. But he was talking about

meeting in the morning. I don't do mornings. So yeah, I go to class one day and the teachers like, we have a guest speaker. And the guy I was seeing on campus was speaking to the class. I was like, oh wow, he's really out here doing this. Yeah, so he basically came to the class, he was talking about organization he started on campus. And basically, he's talking about how there's no L's in life and stuff like that".

Also, Research Participant Seven (RP7) was not informed from the institutional communication. RP7 stated,

"So when I first came to the Western Mountain University, I wasn't aware of the AAMI organization. Once I enrolled into the school, I had a group of friends that was like "hey, have you heard about the group that's about ... well basically a group of African-Americans" and I was like no, I wasn't aware of that. Then they were like you can contact the director. At that point we were probably like two weeks into the semester and I was like man. But he was like it's getting to the deadline to join, but he might be able to work something out, because that's when classes was like, what was it when it's too late to change your classes. Yeah, that was coming to an end and he was like ... then I ended up contacting the director and he was like he'll see what he can do although it's kind of late. But he did some magic and I ended up joining it and it's been good since".

Though the participants stated they heard about the AAMI in two different ways, the participants were thankful to have learned about the AAMI. Participants



echoed RP7 when stating the AAMI has been great experience since they were introduced to the initiative.

### **Perception of Faculty and Staff in the AAMI**

The next series of questions were about participants' perceptions of the faculty and staff who were involved in the AAMI. During the interviews, the participants cited faculty and staff interactions as a positive influence of their success. The interactions with faculty, staff, and other peers in the AAMI proved to be a positive influence on the student success. According to Strayhorn and Terrell (2007), a positive relationship with Black students and faculty can bring satisfaction to the Black students' experience. Most of the relationships with the faculty members involved with the AAMI were intentional, formal relationships. Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) noted student-faculty relationships provided positive role models and support systems. Further, students who have faculty members as a mentor were more confident (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). As Tinto (1975) discussed, peer and faculty interactions serve as a reinforcer to the social integration needed for Black students. The structure of the mentoring initiative allowed faculty members to be visible in the both academic and social settings. Simmons (2013) mentioned, "Involvement is one way for students to develop relationships with their peers and faculty" (p.69). Ensuring these connections take place for African American male students with faculty and staff is a critical element of the mentoring initiative. As RP2 reflected,

"Yeah. All my interactions, I feel like it's been one of my favorite parts about AAMI, because yes, I am a young black man helping those behind me. Like,

helping lift them as I climb, but then there's also emphasis on that latter part, "As I climb". Personally, I'm trying to become a better man, not just a better African American male, but a better man in general. And program director is a staff member of the diversity center, he always emphasizes for us to not use the whole African American part as such a whole... Just like to just hang on it. He mainly encourages us to hang on the "male" part because no matter what, we are all young men trying to come up in the world; trying to make it and be successful in the long run. So, it's important to give back and to help everybody that we can, no matter if you're African American or not, we want to help everybody, and help them succeed while were succeeding ourselves"

Additionally, Research Participant Three (RP3) continued to reflect,

"Our faculty and staff have been very pleasant. I've never felt any hostility or anything like that. They're always very comforting and very welcoming. They want more black men to come out to these events. They want more black men to join AAMI, not just here at the university. They're very nice & hospitable to you. They help you out and tell you about things on campus, like where the dining hall is, or student housing, or what classes you should take. Because sometimes I'll walk in here and I'll see them telling kids about classes. They'll be giving kids advice. Sometimes, they will literally talk to us like we're one of their peers. And that's a really big thing between young adults, who are my age, and fully-functioning, grown adults, who have families and everything. And they're like, "Yeah, man, this is what you got to

do. I'm a father. I have a job. I've got a wife, X, Y, Z. And if you want a good, happy life, this is what you gotta do. It's not going to be easy. It's going to be hard. But, hey, it's fun".

Lastly, RP7 stated about the faculty director's impact,

"Okay, starting with faculty director, if there's anything that I questioned academically or pertaining to volunteering or any type of career advice, I'll ask him for guidance, and he'll give me good feedback".

Throughout the interviews, participants believed that the faculty and staff played a vital role in the AAMI. Both faculty and staff not only brought needed structure to the initiative, they were passionate and truly cared about the students' success. The faculty-student and staff-student interactions were structured intentionally to impact the way some of the participants viewed the institutions, as well as their outlook on life experiences.

### **Perception of the Success of AAMI**

When discussing the perception of the success of AAMI, participants stated the structure of AAMI had a positive impact on their ability to join other campus-based student organizations. Most of the participants' first campus-based student organization was the AAMI. As Simmons (2013) mentioned, "college and universities are the context for social exchange among students and are the sources of student involvement in clubs, organization and other activities" (p.69). Here are some of the participants' accounts:

RP2 discussed the structure of the initiative being successful,

“The structure at Northwest Valley University, I love the structure here. I mean, I really love the structure at Western Mountain University too, but the structure at Northwest Valley University... It makes us aware. We’ve been working where we implemented Distinguished Black Gentlemen [DBG]. It was a student organization on campus that died out, but we brought it back under the umbrella of AAMI. Because here we’ve made it a priority to get all African American male students involved. After you’re done with the freshman AAMI cohort, being a member of that, you become a sophomore and then if you’re not able to become an ambassador, there’s just this gray area of, “What’s my purpose at AAMI? What am I doing? I’m just going to events. So, we thought of a great idea to bring DBG under the umbrella to be that middle man, to be that general body of sorts for AAMI. I feel like that has really made things much easier in a sense of inclusion for everybody. The structure of the program I believe is really good right now, I feel like the structure is good at Northwest Valley University”.

Additionally, although many of the participants were in leadership roles in different student-based organizations on campus, they believed their participation was because of their involvement with AAMI. There are previous studies that documented the, “benefits of engagement in student organizations and out-of-class activities on identity development, retention, and other outcomes produced in college for African American students (Cokley, 2001; Evans et al., 1998; Flowers, 2004;

Fries-Britt, 2000; Harper, 2004, 2006c; Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005; Howard-Hamilton, 1997)” (as cited in Harper & Quaye, 2007, p.130).

Research Participant 5 accounted his student involvement and engagement with student organizations because of his involvement with the AAMI. RP5 stated, “I’d say, for me personally, AAMI was successful with me because I just feel like I’ve seen it be successful within my group. Because like I said, when I came to college, I wasn’t worried about being involved on campus or anything like that. I had no desire. I didn’t know about stuff going on campus. I didn’t know what was going on campus like that. And then just through AAMI, being around people from AAMI got me involved in different programs and got me to know more people on the campus. I feel like I’ve grown a lot and been able to build my resume a lot due to what AAMI has instilled in me”.

Research Participant Ten shed light on his relationship in the AAMI, and more specifically his relationship with the program director, which allowed him to be involved with more student organizations. RP10’s account:

“I have a great relationship with the program director, he has pretty much introduced me to a number of other organizations alongside AAMI. He introduced me to the coordinator for the Emerging Leaders program, so I got into that. He also told me about the Emerging Healthcare Leaders program, so it helps with getting you more involved. I would say it was a great choice for guidance as a freshman and resume building also. He helped with that”.

Lastly, one participant discussed the success of the end of the year ceremony. At this ceremony, the program director reviewed the data with the current cohort of students. The data showed the impact of the institution's student population and the students who are in AAMI. The data reviewed persistence, retention, and graduation numbers from the institution.

Research Participant Six (RP6) stated,

“Oh wow. I think my biggest realization was that this is something pretty big and has been pretty successful at our end of the year ceremony. Pretty much just went over the award. They had some statistics. We didn't know they were taking those things into account and whatnot. The numbers don't lie. It was just so significant, increases and significant differences between our twenty-five guys and the rest of the Northwest Valley University. Just seeing that differentiation and seeing the success that we put into each other it makes you think about it, like wow, “we were doing all this, but we were having fun doing it, you know? And then you look back like, wow, other people aren't doing this. Like we thought this was normal and that was our biggest realization. Like, alright now we got something going, keep it going. A little motivation type thing”.

Though both AAMI programs offered students an end of the year ceremony, this statement was specifically made about the Northwest Valley University's AAMI. The participant was not only motivated by the results, but by the individuals who

were impacted by the AAMI which was rewarding to see from the participate perspective.

### **Perception of the Unsuccessful Program**

Participants were asked about their perception of components of the mentoring initiatives that were unsuccessful. While describing the ways to improve the mentoring initiative, 33% of the students discussed the need for those in the program to participate in more campus events and activities, or to attend more study hall sessions. Research Participant 3 reflected on the experience of gathering students to attend the events hosted by AAMI as an area of improvement:

“I’m really trying to think. I mean, of course, as being the business major, you can always do things better. I guess the turnouts can be a little bit more. Even though there are a lot of black men that do come out, I guess we could reach full capacity, instead of 85 percent, 70 percent, something like that. But, I mean, yeah, that’s probably the biggest thing. We have a good base that comes out, but it would be better to see new faces. Which I feel like they realized last year, and so they’ve got a better, a younger audience that come out, like freshmen. Freshmen. Because usually freshmen don’t usually come to the events. Usually, it’s juniors and seniors because we’re a year, half a year away from graduating, so we’re like, “All right, then, how do we become businessman?” And so, we’ll do that. And I guess freshmen aren’t ... You know, you’re a freshman. You come to college. And you’re trying to turn up

with your friends, drink, and hang out, and stay up late, and stuff like that.

But, yeah, probably targeting a younger black audience”.

Further, there was the need to increase the number of students who attended AAMI study hall sessions. Participants were expected to attend at least two sessions throughout the week. Some participants failed to meet this obligation. Throughout the semester, some of the participants’ early alert grades were below average. The early alert system was used to ensure students who were high risk had support. Students who were below average for the AAMI were students who had a semester cumulative grade point average of 2.5. The study sessions were meant to give structure to the first-year participants, as well as allow them to ask questions of their peers.

Research Participant 8 reflected on the study hall sessions: “Let me think about that. I would probably say it would be unsuccessful during times when we have to attend study halls, because a lot of people did not come to study hall sessions. And those who come some did not study much. The students just chill and not really use the time that was intended to be used for to study on school related material is not used correctly, I believe”.

Lastly, one of the participants discussed the need for students to continue to attend classes. Throughout the semester, participants had weekly check-ins. During the weekly meetings the participants would state if they were passing or failing their classes. It was the goal of the weekly check-ins and the mid-semester grade checks to



support students who were having challenges transiting to college. Through the check-ins, students were able to develop action plans if they were not doing well.

### **Implementation of the AAMI**

The participants were asked about their perceptions of what could be implemented in the AAMI, specifically in what areas they believed the mentoring initiatives were doing well. The participants expressed the need for additional resources with the mentors in the mentoring initiative. Since the mentoring initiative was tailored to the first-year students' experiences, the mentors or ambassadors felt as though they needed additional support. The support could come from peers of the mentors or from individuals within the program. Research Participant 4 reflected on the need to develop the mentors/ambassadors:

“One thing I believe could be improved would be the development of the ambassador development part of it. Because we're still students as well. So still it is important for us to get that development. We do a lot of stuff, but I'd say giving us more opportunities to get other mentors that are like above us would help us a lot. I think the relationship between the ambassadors and the FAM[ily] is good and it allows us to support the mentees in the program”.

Further, participants stated the need to have participants' grades reviewed more often. According to Research Participant 9,

“I think we should check in on our grades, because I feel like a lot of my peers lie about going to class and their grades. If they are asked how things are going with the course work. Many of them would say...So how are your

AAMI classes going? Oh, it's going great, but then you never see them going to class, so it's like come on. So, I think they should be checking in on your grades a little bit. Especially if it's a community zone, I guess the one on one weekly meetings".

Additionally, participants described the need to take additional classes together. The effect of taking classes together through their first year was an indicator of the students' perception of the mentoring initiative. Research Participant 8 reflected,

"One thing that was really good was the fact that a lot of us have a lot of the classes together. I know I have classes with two of the guys. I believe we have three classes together. Actually, I went to high school with two people in the AAMI. We have the same classes, so it's kind of like high school almost, because we have the same classes again. So, I feel like that just makes it easier for us to get our work done together, because we already have a really good foundation."

Lastly, one of the participants reflected on the experience of getting to know other members outside of the institution. One of the major experiences of AAMI was the number of guest speakers who were invited to give different insights from their lived experiences. Research Participant 10 reflected,

"What could definitely remain the same is the various number of visitors we have. We have a lot of other people come from different colleges, other black

males that are lawyers, etc. they come, and they give us guidance on how they became who they are or whatsoever”.

Though Research Participant 10 stated he believed the guest speakers were great, he wanted to see more speakers come to speak about different career fields and areas of interest the students were interested in.

### **Engagement**

Participants discussed instances where their ability to have faculty and peer engagement enhanced their college experience. The engagement with the African American male community and the faculty members who were involved with the mentoring initiative was impactful to their collegiate journey. Research Participant 2 stated,

“The most satisfying experience is my relationship with the faculty and my peers ... It’s just my overall relationship with everybody involved in the program because when you’re dealing with like-minded individuals, it really sets you up to gain an infinite amount of knowledge. Because you’re going to learn from everybody and everything. You can learn from your mentee, your mentor, peers. You can learn from anybody. And I feel like that’s the most important thing with the program, because it’s building a brotherhood, it’s building communication and things of that nature. Where you’re always going to be in a position where you can learn something new that you didn’t know before, or whether it be information regarding other people, regarding life, regarding just anything in life or even about yourself”.

Another participant discussed opportunities to engage in public speaking when asked about the most satisfying experience during the mentoring initiative. There were participants who had not given speeches in front of people or in a public setting until they became members of the AAMI. The AAMI brought the participants out of their comfort zone. Research Participant 4 reflected,

“Especially with public speaking. I wasn’t even an ambassador at the time, I was a mentee, my mentor would put me on spot during meetings and other programming events. As I begin to do more public speaking, naturally you’re going to get nerves, but now I feel like I have no problem speaking in front of crowds. I credit a lot of that to AAMI”.

RP7 continued to reflect,

“So far it’s been great stepping out of my comfort zone, because in high school I did not talk to anyone. Cause I wasn’t really a fan of being an extrovert, my mom would say I was anti-social. So I didn’t have many friends. I literally have the same exact friends from when I was in Florida. So far I’ve been much more social. I’ve began networking more within my major and looking up to people in higher positions at this university, taking these smalls steps towards improving will help me be successful in the future and step out of my comfort zone”.

Additionally, participants discussed time management as a satisfying factor during their collegiate journey. One of the major themes discussed was the development of time management skills. Research Participant 6 reflected,

“Oh, time management. Because AAMI, it takes some of your time up, it takes a lot of your time up if you’re doing it right, I’ll say that much. If you’re really trying to uphold the three pillars that we have and our aims and everything then it’s going to take up a lot of your time. It forces you to find time slots and to plan out your time and to be intentional about making time for certain things, kind’ve pushing out some of the other stuff. That was one of the things I needed to work on, but I got acclimated quickly as time went on. I gotta attribute that to AAMI fully and totally”.

As the participants continued through the first semester of college, they began to understand the importance of having a schedule as essential to their academic success in college.

### **Impact of the AAMI on Collegiate Journey**

When summarizing the impact of the AAMI on their collegiate journey, some participants did not fully understand the impact of the AAMI until the end of the interview. It was at the end of the interview when participants began to share how much they credited the AAMI for their collegiate experiences so far in college.

Research Participant 4 offered,

“I credit everything to AAMI, like I said. They push me. They pushed me a lot to get more involved on campus, to be a leader, to open my eyes to different mindsets like meeting different people. I walked into meetings with organizations that are predominantly white and felt comfortable in myself. I would say AAMI developed me so well, and it continues to develop me.

Because even though I'm a mentor, I learn new stuff from my mentees all the time. Everybody can be a resource for you regardless. I credit everything to AAMI".

Additionally, RP5 continued,

"I definitely believe if I was not a part of AAMI or had not been introduced to the AAMI program, meeting my mentor and stuff like that, I don't feel like my college experience would be the same at all. I don't know if I would've become a student leader. Cause I'm trying to think of anything in my path that would've led me to that, outside of AAMI. So, I think that it changed the whole trajectory of my college career because my freshman year I was just going to class, hanging out with my friends, doing my work, that was it.

Minding my business, staying out the way".

The impact, as many of participants stated, would be seen as they matriculated and graduated from college. The participants understood the value they had by participating in the initiative; however, the additional support given to the participants allowed for them to have a better transition to their collegiate journey.

### **Discussion of Research Findings**

**Research question one** - What was the perception of African American males who participated in African American male initiatives at two predominantly White institutions in the University System of Georgia?

The analysis of the data for research question one brought light to the perceptions of African American male students who participated in the AAMI. Three

concepts emerged: networking, the structure of the AAMI, and sense of belonging. The findings revealed reasons why students saw the AAMI as not only an academic organization, but a social group as well. For many of the participants, the AAMI was the first campus organization in which they were involved. The institutions used marketing materials to connect with freshman African American male students ahead of their arrival to campus. As mentioned previously, the program directors connected with students prior to their arrival to campus. The communication was sent directly to the admitted African American male students, and included all of the requirements for the mentoring initiative. Both AAMIs required participants to take a freshman year seminar course, and the courses had all members of the cohort in it. The AAMI was successful at putting the group of first-year African American students together, which allowed the students to network. As Research Participant 1 stated,

“It offered an opportunity to network with people, so I thought that it was a good thing. Also, we had community leaders present to us at different workshops. This allowed us to engage with the institution campus partners and meet former alumni who were a part of the AAMI”.

According to Pope (2002), the success of African American students strongly depended on their integration into the academic and social systems of institutions of higher education (as cited in Sinanan, 2016). Tinto’s theory provided support for institutions to intentional connections for students to feel connected to the institution. Using mentoring in a formal structure, institutions allowed the student to navigate their collegiate experiences with support and resources.

The correlation between student participation in formal mentoring initiatives and student success is measurable, as it directly impacts institutions' retention and graduation rates. Formal mentoring is a structured mechanism typically pairing by the college or university based on similarity (Sinanan, 2016):

“Advantages to establishing formal mentoring relationships are believed to include the emphasis in providing mentees with specific goals and outcomes. Though proven to have advantageous effects on the student population, many colleges do not offer mentorship on a grand scale to fully assist students who need to navigate the academic system” (Sinanan, 2016, p. 161).

Formal mentors are selected on the basis of their competency, but this assignment is made by the program coordinator, rather than the protégé or mentee (Ragins & Cottons, 1999). The AAMI provided structure for students who were participating. The mentoring structure of AAMI allowed for mentor and mentee relationships to be established. The participants shared how having another student who was an upperclassman African American male was an indispensable part of the mentoring initiative.

Research Participant 4 revealed,

“I would the format or structure of the AAMI. The AAMI was revamped, the We've added the FAM[ily] component of it, which the mentor and the mentee aspect of it, mentoring freshman. The FAM[ily] member is a Freshman AAMI member. Those incoming freshmen who come into college, who have



the option to sign-up, to be a part of AAMI. Now we have a lot of former FAM members who are now ambassadors for the freshman cohort this year”.

The AAMI created a sense of belonging for all of the participants. Further, participants stated the structure of the AAMI played a role in their perception of the mentoring initiative. The participants interacted with one another in both academic and non-academic settings. Considering the students took courses with each other since they were freshman students, it was the goal that some of the students become mentors in AAMI.

Research Participant 11 stated,

“our AAMI is great! Personally, I really like the fact we are in classes together. I think it has been helpful to be able to have study hall on Tuesday nights 7pm-9pm and Friday morning from 10am-12pm. We have a class on Tuesday and Thursday, it’s a fifty-minute class. We learn a lot from each other, and the professor allows former alumni and other campus guest speakers to come into the class to discuss different issues impacting our community or just normal course work we may have. We meet not long during times of the courses we hang out a lot”.

The values of sense of belonging started at the beginning of the mentoring initiative as students were initially connected through the program. After initial connections were made, students started their academic year with peer, faculty, and staff associations, which allowed for interactions and support of all individuals in the academic and nonacademic spaces. According to Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods

(2007), students who reported more academic integration experienced an increase in sense of belonging over time. The researchers found that students with less academic integration experienced a decrease in sense of belonging (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007).

**Research question two** - What impact did participation in African American male initiatives have on African American male persistence in college?

The participants expressed how the AAMI impacted their experiences at the two institutions. The AAMI was successful in navigating their freshman year of college. The participants' responses focused around three factors: relationships with peers, the commitment of the program directors, and the development of time management skills.

The AAMI allowed the participants to develop relationships with their peers throughout the program. Participants were able to attend events on campus, and were informed of different campus resources to support first-year students. These resources were given and taught during the freshman seminars, where they were able to develop a friendship with others in the AAMI. The relationships also allowed the students to be able to support one another throughout the initiative. Research Participant 5 stated,

“The AAMI helped me with my become more social and really try to get to know others around me. It's also helped me with my confidence because I see other dudes doing things, and I will be like I feel like I can do the same thing,

you know. And just having that around you with different black males that are doing great things, it inspires me to lock in to do great things myself’.

The findings revealed the AAMI program directors’ commitment to the program success impacted the students. The participants stated that, although the faculty program director was White, he was still engaged, and students began to trust him even though he was a White male. Participants in both programs stated that their program directors cared about their experiences in college, their academic standing in their coursework, and their perceptions of the program. All twelve research participants had positive statements regarding the program director. One participant reflected,

“Yeah. So, the first time I met the faculty director of the program, who runs AAMI, it was at orientation, like I said. He just told me what I would expect coming into it. I didn’t think much of it at the time, other than it would be something to help me transition to college. After that, I met him, I believe, the last day before classes started, and he told us who he was and a lot of stuff about the program and its previous members or mentors, and things as such. It was surprising that he was running it, considering he’s not African American. But I feel like most people inside of AAMI don’t care too much about that now. In the beginning, yeah sure, there were a lot of doubts. I even had doubts myself. I wasn’t sure how this was going to go, is how he was a White man running an African American club, or organization. Eventually, I

feel like everyone in the organization respects him and understands that he's here for us, not doing this for any, but to help us”.

The AAMI program director at Western Mountain University was a staff member. and the program director at Northwest Valley University was a faculty member. Both program directors had a significant impact on student success throughout their collegiate journey. The participants felt the program directors went beyond their duties, by answering calls during evening hours, giving advice about manhood, guidance regarding their first-year experience, advising on student academic plan, and most importantly, listening to their issues.

Giving back to the community was something many of the participants felt impacted their collegiate journey. Participants were asked to participate in a community service project once a month, in conjunction with other programming outreach efforts on both campuses. Students were able to bond with each other in academic and social settings, and they were able to participate in community service projects. One participant explained,

“So, I feel like my previous semester, when there were more mentors and graduating seniors from AAMI. We were able to do community service more. Community services for AAMI are important since it is not mandatory to do the services. Some of the older mentors and mentees decided years ago to add community services to the AAMI. It started as little volunteer thing. Now, most of us are involved. And it taught me to be more of a very caring person.

The world is harsh, so you should help people. It showed me that, even though you can make it, that you are also obligated to help other people”.

The last emerging theme identified from the participants was the development of time management skills. According to RP8,

“I would say time management has been satisfying. It’s helped a lot about just checking your email and staying on top of your grades, on top of your classes, making sure you know exactly what you need done. They were adamant about that, just make sure you stay on top of your classes. I would say that’s something that they helped me shape in my early years of undergrad”.

### **Summary**

The findings from this chapter highlighted the positive impact the AAMI had on the participants’ collegiate experiences. Chapter Four outlined the data captured through interviews. Descriptions from the data analysis and emerging themes were described through the participants’ responses. The emerging themes allowed the researcher to describe the lived experiences of the participants of the AAMIs. The findings highlighted the perception of the AAMI, from the faculty, staff, and peer interactions, to the institutional support and resources given to the participants. Additionally, the findings of the study explained the impact the AAMI had on the participants during their collegiate journeys. The findings allowed the participants to give their voices to the experiences they shared in the AAMIs. Students expressed how they were able to grow personally and professionally with the structure of the AAMI. Chapter Five will provide the results, overview of the emerging themes from

the research questions, the limitations, and recommendations for the institutions and future research.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusions**

This chapter highlights the qualitative data collected from twelve research participants in two AAMIs. There were several themes that emerged during the interviews:

- 1) networking,
- 2) the structure of the AAMI,
- 3) sense of belonging,
- 4) relationships with peers, faculty and staff,
- 5) the commitment of the program directors, and
- 6) the development of time management skills.

This study used semi-structured interviews to highlight the lived experiences of twelve students participating in AAMIs at two PWIs. Feedback provided from the participants will benefit each mentoring initiative and institution. As discussed in Chapter Three, understanding the perceptions of African American male students participating in the AAMI is necessary to increase African American male students' persistence and retention (Brooms, 2016). By conducting a qualitative phenomenological study, the participants shared their stories and lived experiences as African American male students. The participants offered feedback on their introductions to the AAMI, ways in which the AAMI was successful and unsuccessful, their perceptions of their institution, their perceptions of the faculty and staff, and their engagement with their peers. This study used participants from two of

the four comprehensive regional institutions in the University System of Georgia. The research is beneficial to all institutions who support African American male students. This chapter will review the conclusions and recommendations for further research.

### **Limitations**

There were six students participating from each institution's AAMI and a total of twelve students participated in the study. The sample size is a subset of the number of students who participated in the programs. The USG has four institutions categorized as comprehensive regional universities; however, the study used only two of the four institutional AAMIs since two institutions were in the process of revamping their programs when the study was conducted. Both institutions selected are near the state's largest metropolitan area. Participants in this study were recruited with the assistance of the institutional personnel (program directors, coordinators, and advisors). The study was a snapshot of participants' recollections of their experiences as African American male students in their AAMI. Also, the study looked at the beginning of their college experience, and did not follow the students' matriculation throughout college. The study would have benefited from several interactions with the participants to build trust and learn more about their collegiate journeys. During the interviews, some participants were able to share more about their experiences than others in the program.

### **Recommendations**



There are several recommendations for future research about African American male perceptions of their AAMI. This study reduced the gap in the current literature on African American male students who participate in AAMIs. Continuous research should be done to support African American male initiatives and African American male students' persistence in college. First, there should be more studies to determine how faculty, staff, and peer engagement can impact the persistence of African American males. For example, students felt connected to the staff and faculty members in the AAMI, which impacted their experiences while in college. Students felt more informed about campus resources, as well as supported by the staff and faculty members. Second, this study discovered the importance of having AAMI at PWI, as they created a sense of belonging for the students. For example, this study revealed students who participated in the AAMI felt a sense of belonging to the AAMI and their respective institutions. Third, peer mentoring was vital to AAMI success: students enjoyed having peers as mentors who had participated in the AAMI previously. For example, the mentors allowed the mentoring initiative to have structure, and held the freshman mentees accountable to attending study hall sessions. This peer-to-peer mentoring affected the success of the participants.

Other recommendations can be offered from the review of the literature in Chapter Two. Mentoring initiatives at both institutions were used to support African American male student retention and persistence. As USG increases the amount of African American male students attending their colleges and universities, the USG must continue to support mentoring initiatives. Researchers such as Cuyjet (2006),

Dancy (2012), Harper (2013), and Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) identified the lack of positive institutional support as a factor in the number of postsecondary degrees awarded to African American males. Students who participated in the AAMI should feel supported by the members of the institution. Little support from the institution could result in students not matriculating to graduation. Moreover, there are existing mentoring programs and initiatives throughout the United States used to support African American male students (Brooms, 2016). It is essential that institutions look at the mentoring initiatives as an avenue to support students through college completion. Mentoring best practices should be used to ensure the AAMIs use current trends and higher education data analysis to assist students. Institutions are ultimately responsible for students once they are admitted. The resources of the institution must be examined to support marginalized students at predominantly White institutions. As more states and federal funding continue to be tied to student retention, persistence, and graduation rates, more institutions will have to continue to implement programs and services to support students. Additionally, the need for enrolling underrepresented students will be critical, since many funding avenues measure the success of marginalized student populations.

Lastly, the researcher thinks it is important to discuss the recommendations for institutions to successfully implement an AAMI. First, an institution's commitment to AAMIs is essential to mentoring initiative success. For example, the USG saw the need to increase the support for African American male students; these efforts led to the state-wide initiative. Since each institution has a different structure,

each developed its own AAMI based on the characteristics of the institution. Information collected from the participants in the mentoring initiative will allow there to be continuous enhancement of the initiative. Second, understanding Tinto's student development theory and Astin's student involvement theory is essential to this study; students who were involved valued the mentoring initiative. After the interviews, some participants expressed they did not think about the impact of the AAMI. However, after conducting the face-to-face interviews, the participants began to see what impact the AAMI had on their experiences in college. The participants reported their perceptions were based on interactions with individuals in the academic and social settings of their collegiate experiences.

Finally, there should be research done by the respective institutions to understand what career paths participants take after graduation. During the interviews, participants said they enjoyed connecting with African American male leaders in the community, as well as alumni who participated in the AAMI. The networking connections allowed the participants to gain insights on other African American males whose experiences may have been similar to their experiences at a PWI.

### **Closing Remarks**

This study showed that AAMI allowed African American males to feel connected to their institution. The researcher was inspired to conduct this study because of college friends who were in similar mentoring initiatives in college. Additionally, the stories I listened to from the participants were inspiring. As an African American male, I understood my bias related to African American male success and the development of African American male students. The participants' peers played a critical role in their success, since many of the students were in courses together.

While each research participant stated the AAMI had a positive impact on their college experiences, students believed their experiences were supported by the need to assist African American males at PWIs. Both program directors had a positive impact on the students' success, and naturally, they were the first point of contact on the college campus regarding navigating their experiences. Currently, both institutions AAMIs have upper-class students who mentor first-year college students. The students meet once a week inside of the academic class or during weekly workshops. The AAMIs are designed to support the students throughout their college experiences; however, it is vital for mentors to help their mentees continuously. One of the participants discussed the need to increase the development of the mentors as well. Since mentors are still in college, there is a need to support mentors. As African American male students in the mentoring initiative matriculate through college, they will become mentors in the initiative to support the freshman

students who are coming behind them. The mentors knew and understood the freshman students needed more guidance than they did; however, the desire for continuous mentorship was expressed among the upper-class mentors.

Since colleges and universities are increasing the amount of African American students on their campuses, these institutions should be concerned about the persistence and retention of these students. There are many barriers African American males face while at predominantly White institutions. African American male students face barriers at their institutions, and their successes were tied to the impact of the AAMI on their collegiate experience. Since colleges and universities now have performance-based funding, institutions must support African American males. By supporting students, resources must be allocated to engage with students to ensure the students ultimately graduate from their institutions. The formal structure of the AAMI was important since it allowed students to interact with faculty and staff within the institution. Therefore, to decrease the achievement gap of African American male students, institutions must develop AAMI to support student success.

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## Appendix A

**Introduction and Invitation to Prospective Study Participants**

Date

Dear XXX,

You have been invited to participate in a research study that will examine African American student perception of the university's African American male initiative. The information you provide will be used to complete research for the Education Leadership doctoral capstone at Morehead State University. You will be asked to participate in an interview conversation that will be taped recorded.

I thank you for agreeing to take part in this study voluntarily. By completing the consent form, you agree to take part in this research study. At any point during this research you will not be forced to answer any question or questions that make you uncomfortable. Additionally, you may choose not to take part in the study at all. There are no expectations of return for your participation, if you chose not to be in this study or stop at any time, you would not lose any benefits.

I am looking forward to having the opportunity to meet with you and hear your story. Attached is a copy of the Consent Form. Please review, complete, and return via email.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at 219-381-1593 or by email at robertdsparks2@gmail.com and Dr. Fujuan Tan, Associate Professor at Morehead State University serves as chair of my committee can be reached at f.tan@moreheadstate.edu if there are other questions or concerns.

Best regards,  
Robert Sparks  
Doctoral Candidate  
Morehead State University

## Appendix B

**Communication to Prospective Study Participants**

Date

Dear XXX,

As I work to complete my doctoral capstone at Morehead State University, I thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. As it has been shared with you, my research will examine the perception of African American male students participating in African American male initiatives at predominantly White institutions.

I am looking forward to having the opportunity to meet with you and hear your story. The conversation should last between 45 minutes to an hour. I will contact you via email with additional information. Attached is a copy of the Content Form you completed, can you review to ensure all information is correct and has not changed? If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at 219-381-1593 or by email at robertdsparks2@gmail.com and Dr. Fujuan Tan, Associate Professor at Morehead State University serves as chair of my committee can be reached at f.tan@moreheadstate.edu if there are other questions or concerns. Due to the time restraints of the study, I ask that you, please provide a response by (completion date).

Best regards,  
Robert Sparks  
Doctoral Candidate  
Morehead State University

## Appendix C

**Communication to Program Directors**

Date

Dear XXX,

Your work with the university's African American Male initiative could impact students on your campus. As I complete my research for the Adult and Higher Education Leadership doctoral program at Morehead State University, I will be seeking to examine African American male perception of African American Males Initiatives at predominantly White institutions.

I plan to interview individuals who have participated in institutionally funded supportive African American Males Initiatives at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). This research is an opportunity to share the stories of undergraduate students to learn from, grow and improve our respective institutions.

I am seeking your assistance in this endeavor in connecting with prospective students to participate in a research study. Student participation is voluntary, and responses will remain completely confidential. Your participation in assisting me to connect with students who are participating in your program within the past three years will be a tremendous help as we seek to identify mechanisms to support student persistence and retention.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at 219-381-1593 or by email at [robertdsparks2@gmail.com](mailto:robertdsparks2@gmail.com) and Dr. Fujuan Tan, Associate Professor at Morehead State University serves as chair of my committee can be reached at [f.tan@moreheadstate.edu](mailto:f.tan@moreheadstate.edu) if there are other questions or concerns.

Best regards,  
Robert Sparks  
Doctoral Candidate  
Morehead State University

## Appendix D

### **In-Depth Individual Interviews**

To gain a detailed depiction of participants' perspectives related to their African American male initiative experiences, I will conduct individual interviews, each lasting 45-60 minutes. These interviews will be semi-structured and audiotaped. The individual interview questions were arranged from general to specific to follow a progression of participants' experiences with the African American male initiative. I will ask:

- Tell me about the process by which you began participating with the African American male initiative. Describe how you decided to participate with the African American male initiative.
- What was your experience in the process of the African American male initiative? Tell me about your interactions with the coordinator/director, faculty, staff, students and administrators.
- Tell me about a time when you think it (African American male initiative) was successful.
- Tell me about a time when you think it (African American male initiative) was unsuccessful.
- What would you describe your role in the African American male initiative? Are you a mentor or mentee?
- What one change would you like to see implemented that would improve your educational experience in the African American male initiative and what one thing should remain?

- How did participation with African American male initiative help you enhance specific skills that you would realistically use in your collegiate journey?
- Please describe what has been most satisfying about your experience so far at this institution, and what has been most disappointing?
- How has participation in the African American male initiative impacted your collegiate experience?
- To wrap up, if you had any additional comments or feedback that you'd like to share on the quality of your African American male initiative on your educational and personal experience, please feel free to share.



## Appendix E

**Interview Participant Consent Form**

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of African American males who are participating in African American male initiatives. The data gathered will be used to complete a research project entitled “Their perception: African American males in African American male initiatives at two predominantly White institutions”. The research is expected to give the universities more insight to support retention and persistence of African American males. The interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Your identity will remain confidential and only the researchers will have access to records of responses. Participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time. The interview in which you will participate will be audio-taped. Records of responses will be deleted 3 years after completion of the project.

Please indicate your consent to participate below, by signing the statement below:

*I understand the information expressed above. I consent to participate in an interview for this research project and to allow my interview data to be used in a research report. I understand that my responses will remain confidential. My name will not be used in any reporting or publication of research data. I also agree to allow my responses to be audio-recorded.*

Participant printed name:

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Participant signature

---

Date

Contact information of the researchers:

Robert Sparks,  
 Doctoral Candidate,  
 Morehead State University  
 Robertdsparks2@gmail.com

Morehead State University  
 Institutional Review Board  
 606-783-2278

## Appendix F

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE IN THIS RESEARCH?**

You are being invited to participate in a research study about the perception of African American male undergraduate students participating in an African American male initiative at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the University System of Georgia. You are being invited as an African American male who attends a regional comprehensive four-year public university in Georgia. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be one of about twelve (12) people to do so.

#### **WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?**

The person in charge of this study is Robert Sparks, principal investigator and doctoral candidate at Morehead State University in the Department of Foundational and Graduate Studies in Education.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

By completing this study, we hope to share the stories of African American males who participate in African American male initiatives at two predominately-white institutions in Georgia. Additionally, the in-depth interviews will seek to identify factors to why these students persistent at their respective institutions that participated in mentoring initiatives for African American male students. This study will provide information to help institutions of higher education improve support African American male student persistence.

#### **ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Other than personal choice, there are no reasons why you should not participate in this study.

#### **WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

The research procedures will be conducted at two Regional Comprehensive Institutions in the University System of Georgia. The researcher will meet with you in person on campus to interview at a mutually agreed upon time. The interview will last about one hour and occur only one time.

#### **WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?**

Your involvement in the research will be 45 minutes to 1-hour interview. Interviews will be audio recorded and led by the researcher.

## Appendix G

**Study Timeline**

August 2018	Proposal Defense
October 2018	IRB Submission
October 2018	Survey development and deployment/Interview questions
November 2018	Data Analysis
January 2019	Write Capstone Chapter 4 and 5
March 2019	Write Abstract
March 2019	First and Final Drafts to Capstone Chair
March 2019	Submit Final Draft of Capstone Committee
April 2019	Capstone Professionally Processed
April 2019	Capstone Defense
April 2019	Format Approval through MSU
April 2019	Submit Capstone and Completion of Degree Paperwork

## VITA

ROBERT DE'ANDRE SPARKS

EDUCATION

- May 2013 Bachelor of Science  
University of West Georgia  
Carrollton, Georgia
- May 2015 Master of Science  
Arkansas Tech University  
Russellville, Arkansas
- Pending Doctor of Education  
Morehead State University  
Morehead, Kentucky

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

- July 2017-present Director of Student Conduct and Community Standards  
Agnes Scott College  
Decatur, Georgia
- July 2015- July 2017 Assistant Director/Student Conduct Officer  
Morehead State University  
Morehead, Kentucky
- July 2013- July 2015 Resident Director and Program Coordinator for Greek Life  
University of Arkansas at Monticello  
Monticello, Arkansas

HONORS

- 2017 30 Under 30 Honoree  
University of West Georgia  
Carrollton, Georgia