

IMAGINING THE UNTHINKABLE: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING AN
INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE PERSISTENCE
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

by

Clyde C. Wilson Jr.

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Educational Leadership

Charlotte

2013

Approved by:

Dr. Lisa Merriweather

Dr. Jae Hoon Lim

Dr. Rebecca Shore

Dr. Brett Tempest

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ABSTRACT

WILSON JR., CLYDE C. Imagining the unthinkable: A case study exploring an institutional response to the persistence of African American males. (Under the direction of DR. LISA MERRIWEATHER)

Over the past thirty-five years, the rates of retention and graduation among African American males attending colleges and universities in the U.S. have declined. Many institutions of higher education have responded to this problem by reexamining their efforts at retaining and graduating Black males. Interventions are being created across the landscape of higher education in efforts to "enhance the enrollment and successful matriculation of African American males" (Cuyjet, 2006, p. 15). A review of literature focused on Black males' perceptions of institutional support programs on predominantly White campuses inspired the present study. Before now, various studies have highlighted the current plight of African American males in higher education and their relatively low persistence to graduation; however, few studies have used a qualitative approach to consider the role of institutional support programs in shaping African American males' experiences in higher education institutions.

The present study was adapted from Oliver's (2008) study, entitled "Exploring the utilization of institutional support structures by black males on a predominantly white campus." Oliver's study amplified the voices of African American males by examining the role that institutional support services play in aiding retention of African American males at a predominantly white institution. The purpose of the present study, which builds on Oliver's, is to understand Black male students' perceptions of the role that institutional support services play in Black male students' retention and matriculation.

The researcher used a case study approach in seeking to answer the following research questions: 1) How do Men Built with Character participants perceive the program's impact on their collegiate experiences? 2) How does the program facilitate academic and social integration for program participants? 3) What are the key dimensions of an Institutional Support Service program aimed at the retention of Black undergraduate males?

The results of this study reveal three themes per researcher question. The themes for Question One were "father figure," "agent for change," and "sense of community." Question Two themes were "awareness," "resiliency," and "growth." Question three themes were "mentorship," "inspiration," and "academic enrichment." Understanding the lived experiences of each participant relative to his involvement in Men Built with Character required more than just statistical analysis. In-depth conversations with these Black males provided deeper reflection on their actual experiences. These conversations also provided new insight into the effectiveness of the Men Built with Character program at BJP. BJP is the alias for the university discussed throughout the dissertation. Men Built with Character is the alias for the institutional support service explored throughout the dissertation.

DEDICATION

Even hope may seem but futile,
When with troubles you're beset,
But remember you are facing
Just what other men have met.
You may fail, but fall still fighting;
Don't give up, whate'er you do;
Eyes front, head high to the finish.
See it through!-Egar A. Guest

This dissertation is dedicated to that one individual who thought it could be done, but needed an example to guide him along the way.

This dissertation is dedicated to the individuals who give of themselves selflessly to ensure that tomorrow's generation is intrinsically motivated to obtain their goals.

This dissertation is dedicated to all those individuals who have encouraged me to persevere and to see it through!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am a product of Mark 11:23-24: "This mountain has been removed and cast into the sea." I know I could not have done it without His power and faith working through me. Therefore, allow my life to serve as a beacon of light unto others.

I am grateful to the men and women who shared their personal stories with me (Chuck, Jerry, Joshua, Chancellor, Traven, Chris, Makinley, Woody, Harry, James Frankie, Danny, and Terri). Thank you for allowing me to use your story to explore the perceptions of Black male students on the role institutional support services play in their retention and matriculation.

This dissertation is a result of the contributions of my family, my friends, and the other individuals who believed in me throughout this process, and it is with great humility that I express my sincere gratitude. I want to thank the many people who accompanied me on this journey and showed generosity, kindness, and unwavering support.

I would like to thank my wife and the Queen of my Soul, Crystal R. Wilson, who not only offered encouragement, but constantly offered support and patience. You have been my best friend and my biggest cheerleader since the day you heard my wild idea to go back to school. Your support, optimism, and complete confidence in me provided the motivation I needed to continue on this journey, and it is so comforting to know that I can always count on you to do everything in your power to help me when I need it. I cannot thank you enough.

I would like to thank my daughter "Little Muffin" who keeps my heart fluttering with excitement and joy. Although you are only nine months old...every time I looked

over and caught you looking at me, I am inspired to keep going. Thanks for being such an awesome listener. When no one else was willing or able to listen to me read my study, you were always clutch.

I would also like to thank my parents for bringing me into this world and always believing in me. As well as my in-laws for your constant prayers and support.

Not only have I been blessed with a supportive family, but also I have been blessed with an endless amount of mentors, advisers, and friends. To my undergraduate academic advisors, Dr. Trent Larson and Dr. Paul Ankomah, the two of you were like fathers to me while away in college. Thanks for preparing me for life and always believing in me.

To the phenomenal women who have impacted my life in a drastic way: Shanika M., Stephanie B., Mary J., Gail O., Bonnie B., Daphne M., Coretta W., Latanya L., Valerie A., Kathy F., Carolyn T., Carla H., Tammy A., Liz B., Regina R., Rena G., Tomecca S., Sandra W., Kathy T-B., Kasey A., Tracey R., Toni T., Felicia B., Roshaunda B., Deb L., Tammy W., Quen D., Christina M., Rose J., Diane W., and Gerrie H.! You all are such wonderful and strong women. I appreciate all of the experiences I have shared with each of you.

I would like to thank my dissertation committee of Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Dr. Rebecca Shore, and Dr. Brett Tempest for their time, patience, support, and guidance. I thank you for your wonderful suggestions and careful thoughts regarding this dissertation. You have been a great help and support. Special thanks to my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Lisa Merriweather, whose steadfast patience and kindness not only helped to develop me as a scholar, but also challenged me to be the best I can be in all situations. I

thank you for hearing my frustrations and allowing me to vent when situations became challenging. Thanks for encouraging me to continue on the pursuit of my doctorate. You allowed me to see different perspectives on various situations. Thank you for being you! I would like to thank Jennifer King for being an amazing Office Manager. Your pleasant spirit made it such a comfortable environment to ask any questions throughout this journey.

My wonderful AFC, Greek Village, Lee Hall, and Sanford Hall staffs have made this journey worthwhile. Everyone on those staffs kept me grounded and provided the anchor I needed to stay focused and to maintain a sense of humor. I just want to say thank you for all your assistance, knowledge, and wisdom that has made me a stronger individual. I am grateful for all the learning experiences and networks that have been formed.

My appreciation also goes to Dr. Luckadoo's Doctoral Support Group. Our group's dynamic was so powerful and at the conclusion of every meeting...regardless of whether I was prepared or not...I felt prepared mentally and academically to continue on the road toward my degree. I have to give a special thanks to Dr. Tim Luckadoo. Thanks for being a friend and mentor. Words cannot express the impact you have had in my life. I thought I was doing great until I met you and realized that true greatness comes by helping others see their potential. I thank you tremendously and hopefully I can share all the wisdom you have instilled in me.

To everyone else that I may have forgotten to mention, thank you all for your continued support, thoughts, and prayers. I have realized that as long as you have a strong determination, will, and faith to succeed, then failure is never an option!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A Historical Look at Black Education in America

Due to various features of the K-12 system, African American males are less likely than other groups to succeed in institutions of higher education. Without the opportunity to further his education, the Black male faces unique challenges that impact his ability to obtain housing, secure employment, and find adequate health care, among a plethora of other problems. In order to fully grasp the situation of African American males in the K-12 system and in higher education today, one must be aware of the history of African Americans' educational plight. As a result of the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, slavery was abolished in 1865. In reaction, several states enacted "black codes" that were designed to limit the civil rights of the newly freed slaves. These codes served as a body of laws, statutes, and rules enacted by southern states to regain control over the freed slaves. The Fourteenth Amendment countered these "black codes" by prohibiting states from denying any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. Wilkinson (1975) indicates that the Equal Protection Clause did not intend to provide equality among the individuals, only equal application of the laws. In the educational environment, African American students were not required to attend a white elementary, secondary, or postsecondary school; states only had to create an equal opportunity for these African American students to be educated.

This posed a unique problem, as the resources provided to Black schools were not equal to resources offered at the white schools.

About fifty years later, *Brown vs. Board of Education* declared that public school segregation at the elementary and secondary levels violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. This case mandated that all schools be integrated regardless of race and was based firmly on the assumption that schools could not simply be equitable; rather, they must be equal (Tushnet, 1994). Love (2004) argues that the NAACP regarded the *Brown v. Board of Education decision* as

a great victory for African Americans, believing [that] it would pave the way to improved education for African American children...it was meant to settle, once and for all, differences in access to educational opportunity and presumable, the resulting differences in academic achievement. (p. 227)

States could no longer legally separate schools by race; rather, schools would be required to integrate and combine resources, granting privileges once only afforded to white constituents. This Supreme Court decision had a profound impact on education in America, particularly for African American students.

African American families believed that desegregation could advance educational opportunities for their children. Love says the Court also found that racial separation psychologically damaged Black students by generating within them "a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone" (p. 494). Jarvis (1992) explains as follows:

Because *Brown* rejected the very second-class citizenship afforded African Americans in earlier Supreme Court cases ... *Brown* has had a profound impact on the dismantling of apartheid in America. In fact, it revitalized the Fourteenth Amendment's original purpose: to help Blacks claim their right to national citizenship. Not only was *Brown* the authority for the prohibition of segregation in

a wide range of public activities, it provided the legal underpinnings for the Civil Rights Act of 1964. (p. 1288)

When we look at the current state of education, it is evident that, in many cases, schools have integrated across America; however, many African American males have not experienced equal educational opportunities. Losen and Orfield (2002) eloquently state:

unconscious racial bias..., resource inequalities..., unjustifiable reliance on IQ and other evaluation tools, educator's inappropriate responses to ... high stakes testing, and power differentials between minority parents and school officials all influence disproportionate identification of minority students [for special education and behavior and emotional disorder classes] (p.117).

For example, Skiba et al. (2008) argue there is an over-representation of African American males in special education programs throughout the K-12 system. Parrish (2002) notes that "[in] at least forty-five states, black children in special education are extensively overrepresented in some categories" (p.15). Glennon (2002) reports that African American males "are greatly underrepresented in those categories that define school success and grossly overrepresented in those categories that demonstrate problems in the school environment" (p. 13).

Once a student has been labeled as lacking in academic talent, his or her experience within the K-12 environment will be altered. Howard (2003) asserted that one disadvantage facing Black males in the K-12 system is the low expectations placed on them by authority figures. Harry, Klingner, Sturges, & Moore (2000) corroborate this point, noting that "once students are receiving special education services, they tend to remain in special education classes[,] and they are likely to encounter a limited, less rigorous curriculum" (p.79). This factor ultimately challenges the students' ability to stay

engaged in the classroom. With lowered expectations, academic and post-secondary opportunities diminish.

All too often, literature portrays a negative image of black males in education. Terms such as "endangered," "uneducable," "dysfunctional," and "dangerous" are familiar descriptors often used to describe black men today (Jackson & Moore, 2006). Davis and Jordan (1994) suggest that "in elementary and secondary education, negative expectations are imposed upon African American men as it relates to their ability to attend college" (p. 574). Consequently, at an early age, the young black male comes to the bleak view that obtaining higher education is unthinkable for him. Attending college does not seem like a realistic goal to many African American males; therefore, going off to college seen less as a priority for themselves and more as an opportunity to be afforded only to others.

Another way that our K-12 system creates unequal education for black males is, in the words of the ACLU (2007), "criminalizing our young black males rather than educating them" (p. 3). This criminalization reinforces the "school-to-prison pipeline." Educational policies and practices push students away from the classroom and into juvenile and criminal justice systems, as opposed to preparing them to be academically equipped to enter into society. The pipeline has developed based on the growing use of zero-tolerance policies, school-based arrests, and disciplinary alternative schools (ACLU, 2007). The rate at which these Black males are being pushed away from the classroom far exceeds the rate in which they are graduating from either secondary or post-secondary educational institutions (Boyd, 2009).

According to "Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males," only 47% of Black males graduated from high school during the 2007-2008 academic school year. Out of the 48 states that reported, data showed that Black males were the least likely to graduate from high school in 33 states (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). Raphael and Stoll (2007) report an alarming fact that more Black men who are 18-24, the traditional age of college students, are in jail and prison nationwide than in college. The total number of Black males in this age range that are incarcerated is 85,600. These men account for 15.9% of the entire prison system. White males make up 10.34% (46,700) of the prison population, and African American females make up 12.03% (3200). Within the traditional age range for college students, there are more Black males incarcerated than enrolled in college regardless of race and/or gender. Based on the sheer numbers in this nation, Black men within this age range are more likely to go to prison than to go to college.

Recognizing the current state of Black males within the American educational system paints a realistic impression of why a need exist to change the trajectory of young Black males. Based on the current path they are going, many are concerned with the dismal graduation rates; thus, institutional support services are being created throughout higher education. Current policies and practices infringe on the educational system's ability to adequately provide equal opportunities for all, even though Brown's decision was intended to extend these opportunities. This lack of equality contributes to Black males falling behind within the K-12 classroom and being underprepared to fully engage in the collegiate experience.

Statement of the Problem

The current situation of Black males on college campuses warrants researchers' investigation. In Shaun Harper's study (2006), he found that "African American men are underrepresented at institutions of higher learning and especially at public flagship universities in the 50 states" (p. vii). In his report, Harper examined important statistics and found that in 2000, "black men represented 7.9 percent of the 18-24 year olds in the United States population" (p. 8). However, in 2004, across the 50 flagship universities his report studied, black men comprised only 2.8 percent of undergraduate student enrollment. Data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that although college enrollment has increased each year, the percentage of African American males enrolled has not increased in proportion to other racial, ethnic, or gender groups.

Moreover, data reveals that the number of degrees conferred on African American males has also not increased in proportion to other racial, ethnic, and gender groups. In 1976, the distribution of degrees conferred upon male graduates was 5.1% to black males and 88.6% to white males. The rate is slightly better today: the percentage of degrees conferred to black males in the 2009-2010 academic school year was 7.9%, which is the highest percentage since 1976, when the data began to be collected. In this same academic school year, though, the percentage of degrees conferred to white males was 72.7%. While the percentage of degrees conferred to white males has dipped over the years, the percentage remains higher than for Black males (NCES, 2011, Table 300).

Across the collegiate landscape, over two-thirds, or 67.6 percent of African American men who start college do not graduate within six years, which, Harper says, is "the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial and ethnic groups in

higher education" (Harper, 2006, p.vii). Over two-thirds of African American males who begin college never finish (Harper, 2005). Because African American males are more likely than Black females to drop out of high school and college, to abuse drugs, become incarcerated, and have increased amounts of psychological issues, African American males are not graduating in great numbers in comparison to any other race and/or gender. (Harvey & Anderson, 2005).

According to Harper (2012), "Black men's dismal college enrollments, disengagement and underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues in American higher education" (p.1). This cries out for the attention of institutions of higher education to rally behind this issue and enhance the state of black men on campus. However, Harper contends that "more troubling than the problems themselves [affecting Black males] is the way they are continually mishandled by educators, policymakers, and concerned others" (p.1).

Various stakeholders within the college and university setting across the board have begun to respond to [Black males] cry and have given considerable attention to enrollment and graduation rates of African American males within higher education. These have become national issues within higher education. The number of degrees conferred on black males, coupled with the low enrollment rates of these males, strengthens the rationale for creating specialized programs geared towards increasing the retention and persistence of African American males attending post-secondary institutions. Intentional efforts have brought awareness to the issue; however, it is a journey that has only begun. Improving graduation rates for African American males will require reframing the conversation around institutional responses towards combating the

dismal graduation rates, looking at persistence and retention, and understanding African American students in K-12. It is imperative that an initiative for increasing African American male retention focus on assisting the student and shaping his collegiate experience. This study delves into a specific program at an urban research institution that helps African American male students persist towards their degrees at predominantly white institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of Black male students on the role institutional support service play in their retention and matriculation. This study intended to amplify the voices of African American males by examining the role institutional support services play in aiding Black male students' retention and matriculation through college at a predominantly white institution.

Research Questions

1. How do Men Built with Character participants perceive the program's impact on their collegiate experiences?
2. How does the program facilitate academic and social integration for program participants?
3. What are the key dimensions of an Institutional Support Service program aimed at the retention of Black undergraduate males?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was the theoretical framework used for this dissertation. Su (2007) contends that Critical Race Theory provides a "unique voice of color," (p. 533) which offers a viewpoint of the "social realities" (p. 533) experienced by

people of color that are different from the narratives that have been previously heard. These new narratives, called "counter narratives," are essential forms through which people of color can share personal, realistic accounts of their life experiences.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology. The primary methods used to collect the data were interviews, focus groups, and archival data. Upon completing all interviews, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis, which was a "process that involved coding and then segregating the data by codes into data clumps for further analysis and descriptions" (Glesne, 2006, p. 147).

Significance of the Study

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), "a study should influence policy, contribute to scholarly literature, and improve practice" (p. 37). Based on the information gleaned from the study, a better understanding of how the participants perceive the program emerged. Their experiences, once shared, can help policy makers make informed decisions that will impact African American males at BJP in the future. BJP is the alias for the university discussed throughout the dissertation. While scholars such as Strayhorn (2008, 2009) and Allen (1992) have drawn conclusions based on quantitative data, the present study used a qualitative approach in order to deepen our understanding of African American male undergraduate students' experiences. From this study, the reader will learn specific factors offered by the participants within a program to shape the future direction or existence of that program. Challenges facing the participants at the institution were uncovered, thus illuminating their overall experience. Moreover, the study offers a glimpse into how the participants infused the academic and social

experiences offered within the program to enhance their overall collegiate experience. Finally, the study also revealed key dimensions of an institutional support program. It offered key components necessary to start a program. Acknowledging that the issues presented do not just affect Black males, but rather affect society as a whole, this study provided intentional strategies to enhance the infrastructure of institutional support programs for African American males.

This study has the potential to influence practice. It was the goal of the researcher to construct the study in such a way that it would be readable and useful to practitioners in the field both at the institution where the study was conducted and at other, similar institutions. By reflecting upon African American male experiences, policy makers, institutional leaders, and practitioners alike can draw from the shared experiences of the individual participants of this study as they develop and refine interventions specifically targeted at addressing retention and graduation rates. Listening to the unique stories offered by the participants created an intentional opportunity to hear firsthand what type of experience they had and how they perceived what the program had to offer. The results from this dissertation add new dimensions, which can be used to enhance graduation rates of Black males at BJP.

Terminology and Language

To ensure the reader understands terms used throughout this study, the researcher has defined the following terms:

- Black or African American: U.S. born citizens having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (Harper, 2003).

- Matriculation: Successful progression from one academic year to the next (Cohen, 1998).
- Persistence: Process of persevering through college and graduating (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).
- Retention: Measured by first-year, fall-to-fall continuous enrollment (Jarmon, 2000).
- First-generation college student: student whose parents did not attend a four-year college or university (Fischer, 2007).
- Predominantly White institution: institution of higher education that historically and currently is comprised of a majority of White student populations, as well as majority White faculty, staff, and administration (Grieger & Toliver, 2001).

Limitations

According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009), "a limitation is some aspect of the study that the researcher cannot control but believes may negatively affect the results of the study" (p. 109). As a former employee of BJP, the researcher was familiar with some of the students who participated in this study. While this fact may have encouraged some students' participation in the study, some participants may have had concerns about confidentiality. However, a level of trust had been established during those previous relationships and encounters. Throughout the study, the researcher made constant reminders to the participants regarding the researcher's obligation to conduct the study in accordance with accepted ethical and professional standards.

This research was viewed through the lens of an emic or insider perspective. The researcher of this study was of African American descent and was male. The researcher

shared in some of the lived experiences of the African American males in the study and understood their plight. The limitation of being an insider also, paradoxically, serves as a strength of this study. Participants may feel more comfortable sharing their stories with someone with whom they identify, even if that identification is based simply on the shared color of their skin. Bettinger (2008) argues that this understanding may limit the researcher's ability to fully explore other individual perceptions. It may even be more difficult that the researcher is an insider because the participants may espouse certain assumptions for the researcher that are unrealistic (Bettinger, 2008, Wheeler, 2003). If the researcher is already known by the participants, the participants may, on the one hand, naturally open up and provide in-depth feedback related to their experiences. On the other hand, though, the previous relationship may bias the response of the participants. The participants may craft responses based on what they may think the researcher wants to hear versus what they believe to be true. The researcher made all necessary attempts to be open-minded and refrain from inserting personal bias.

Although this study was based on a sample of the overall roster of participants within the program, interviewing a larger number of Black males could have resulted in discovering more factors contributing to their success within the realms of higher education. Constraints such as time, money, and resources also made it unrealistic to conduct this study with a larger population. Moreover, given that the setting of this study was a large research university, data ascertained in this study may not be consistent in private schools, two-year colleges, urban or suburban institutions, HBCUs, gender-specific institutions, or institutions in other regions of the United States. However, even with these limitations, the study offers the possibility of fostering a deeper understanding

of Black male students' perceptions of the role that institutional support services can play in the future. Furthermore, understanding the experiences that contribute to the low enrollment trends found at BJP and across the landscape of higher education will enable educators to be proactive rather than reactive in their efforts to enroll more Black males at their respective institutions.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), "no proposed study is without limitations," for "[t]here is no such thing as a perfectly designed study" (p. 42). The researcher's own experiences as a Black male student on a predominantly White campus, as well as his previous work with Black males at the institution where the study was conducted, might influence his interpretation, particularly because the interviews were personal accounts of the participants' respective experiences. The emotional state of an individual at a particular time could affect the outcome of his response (Patton, 2002).

Generalizability is another concern with this study. The findings from a case study cannot typically be generalized to the larger population (Yin, 2012) or to past or future situations; thus, the findings from this case study can only be generalized to the phenomenon under investigation at BJP. While the present study might be read and considered in the future, there can be no guarantee that other institutions will experience results that resemble those found in this study. Qualitative research is not statistically generalizable; however, the findings can be reflected upon and hopefully transferred to similar settings. Transferability is a positive outcome (Marshall and Rossman, 2010).

Delimitations

Simon (2011) defines delimitations as "those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the study" (p.14). The present study is delimited to African

American males attending BJP. The researcher did not study any other racial, ethnic, or gender group in the undergraduate student population, nor did he study students at any other institution. This study was further delimited to a single program housed at the university. Moreover, the study criterion only allowed participants with a 2.0 GPA or higher to participate. This delimitation impacts the sample by focusing on those students in good academic standing as opposed to those who fall below that threshold. The researcher did not study other aspects of the university that might aid in retention and matriculation of Black males in the future.

Assumptions

- The researcher assumes the effectiveness of his techniques, namely, asking questions designed to be engaging and reflective, conducting interviews, and synthesizing the data collected from the participants; the researcher assumes that applying these methods will enable him to offer a broader understanding of the role that institutional support services play in the matriculation and persistence of black males attending the University.
- The researcher assumes that the participants will be comfortable, open, and honest during the interview process, answering all questions truthfully.

Researcher's Identity

I am a black man, living in a world in which to the average observer, I do not belong. Against the grain, I have exceeded society's expectations of me: I have never been incarcerated, I hold both bachelor's and master's degrees, I am employed full-time, I have a baby girl who receives the same love and support that I had and continue to receive from my mother and father, I am happily married to my wife who is my rock, and

I possess mental fortitude which enables me to press on. My story might seem to have an unfamiliar hue, a hue that shows African American men in a positive light.

I grew up in a lower middle-class family where education was a vital part of my life. I was motivated to be better and do better than anyone around me by the feeling that I had to prove myself to everyone. I learned that you could not allow anyone to hold you back from accomplishing your dreams. In November of my junior year in high school, I experienced a major head injury while playing football. I had to have numerous surgeries because cysts began to form on my skull. As I walked the halls of my high school, one of my white English teachers constantly made sarcastic remarks about me because I wore a hat to cover up the scars on my head. Not a day passed that she did not say something negative towards me. One day in school, she sarcastically told me that I would not amount to much because I looked like a "thug." That statement angered me to no end. It pushed me to work as hard as I could to graduate with honors. I went on to attend North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, where I graduated in three and a half years, and then to North Carolina State University, where I finished my master's degree ahead of my cohort.

Having the opportunity to attend a historically black university for my undergraduate degree and a predominantly White institution for my graduate work was transformative. The two experiences were very different, and each transformed my life in particular ways. At my undergraduate institution, there were no programs intentionally designed to support Black males through their college experience. I remember wondering whether other Black men on campus felt the way I did. I was grateful to be able to develop many informal relationships with a wide variety of role models; however, I know

for sure that this was not the case for many of my peers. While in graduate school, I did not encounter any programs designed with the intention of retaining Black men at a predominantly White institution. It never dawned on me that these types of programs were available or even possible. However, during graduate school, I met many undergraduate Black males who would have taken advantage of the opportunity if it had been presented to them.

Realizing that my scholastic aptitude came naturally to me, I have always maximized my potential. I have to credit some of my drive to my white English teacher in high school. Even though I have used her negative energy to motivate myself, I know that I have not always worked up to my fullest potential. I have taken the easy route many times because no one ever pushed me to do differently. Now in my role as an Assistant Director with University Housing at a large predominantly White institution, I see firsthand the importance of connecting and pushing young Black males to achieve as much as they are able.

Throughout the study, I would wonder about how my own subjectivity shaped my perception of the topic under investigation. I consistently thought about ways in which the study was limited from the start. I processed the fact that the participants within this study were young men who were successful in their scholastic endeavors thus far and they were taking part in this program. I recognize that sheer fact may have predisposed them to having a positive experience within the program. While the program was intended to help all, it is realistic to believe that the participants within this study are able to maximize the resources afforded to them through this program, ultimately shaping their experiences positively.

My background in higher education predisposed me to think that students given the opportunity to express themselves freely would do so without holding back. I was expecting that the young men were going to have a more critical perspective of the program. However, by delimiting my sample to students who were succeeding academically, I decreased my ability to access the perceptions of students in need. Often times the students who are excelling are the ones who are having positive experiences.

Without directly asking the participants to make critical comments about the program, I intentionally gave opportunities for students to voice such opinions. I asked probing questions to get the participant thinking about his holistic experience within the program with the hopes that I could draw out critical comments expressing negative perceptions of the program. Surprisingly, the participants in this study overwhelmingly thought that the program was positive, worthwhile, and valuable. They had very few negative things to say.

Working with our young Black males requires a unique passion and commitment. I have learned that the men do not respond to lackluster attempts to connect with them. They thirst for role models and someone to take a few minutes out of the day to speak words of encouragement into their lives. They yearn to hear the stories of other young Black males who have been down the road they are heading, and they want to find comfort in these stories and reminders that it can be done. Many of them have grown up with mothers serving in the dual capacity of mom and dad. She manages all day-to-day duties from the earliest period of the male's life. She deals with sleepless nights, finding day care, paying bills, enrolling her son in numerous opportunities, and being a disciplinarian as well as a confidante throughout the male's life. The mother provides the

guidance and support to help the son navigate through life. While these sons have learned so much from their mothers, I feel a personal obligation to reach back and help the "brothers" out. I am a bridge builder to so many young Black men because I am able to relate, connect, and inspire them to do the unthinkable. Ironically enough, only now do I realize the power of persistence. While pursuing my doctorate, I have been challenged to step outside my comfort zone. I have been discouraged, questioned, and laughed at so many times along this journey. Just the hope of seeing someone who looks like me, who has experienced similar trials and tribulations without giving up, has motivated me to press on.

While I was pursuing my undergraduate degree, it was never made apparent to me that opportunities existed to engage in dialogue with other Black males; and yet, I believe there is no better time to start than now. Capturing the stories of those who have succeeded in their academic pursuits, regardless of the trials they faced along the way, can empower those who follow to have the same courage. No longer can I sit back and do nothing. My life is designed to serve as a catalyst to motivate young collegiate scholars to persist to the finish line. It is through this dissertation that I hope to inform providers of institutional support services about the specific ways in which they can better serve African American males.

Chapter Summary

Frankly, the number of black males enrolled in and graduating from institutions of higher education in the United States is discouraging. Because of the troubling statistics, institutions across the country are intentionally creating interventions to address these issues. Unfortunately, the fact that Black males are graduating at far lower rates than any

other student population heightens the significance of the present study. In this case study, the researcher shares the voices of black males attending a predominantly white institution in the southeastern United States in an effort to understand the role that institutional support services play in matriculation. The results can serve as a sort of sounding board that amplifies the voices of these men to institutional leaders. By shedding light on this topic, this study can inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and practitioners within the field. Chapter Two will review the relevant literature that grounds the study. In Chapter Three, the researcher details the qualitative methodology used in this study. Chapter Four provides a robust analysis of the study's findings. Chapter Five provides summary, a discussion, a review of implications for future studies, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the literature on the African American male phenomena in higher education, literature that serves as a foundation for understanding the role that institutional support services play in Black male students' retention and matriculation. This literature review will analyze persistence, retention, and institutional initiatives in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the African American male collegiate experience and, in so doing, answer the three research questions that have guided this study.

Research Questions

1. How do Men Built with Character participants perceive the program's impact on their collegiate experience?
2. How does the program facilitate academic and social integration for program participants?
3. What are the key dimensions of an Institutional Support Service program aimed at the retention of Black undergraduate males?

Research shows that experiences of African American males in education can be better understood by acknowledging the roles that race and racism play in their experiences. Tatum (1992) refers to racism as a "system of advantage" (p. 6) based on race. She argues that living in the United States exposes individuals to "personal, cultural

and/or institutional manifestations of racism" and that, at some point, everyone has been misinformed about the individuals in those groups that are negatively affected by racism (Tatum, 1992, p. 3). The phenomenon of racism has, within the United States, taken the form of one race being perceived as superior to another. It does not occur on accident; rather, it is purposeful and intentional.

From a historical standpoint, the United States has extolled the idea that everything is equal and just and that everyone starts from a level playing field; however, this has not been the case for African American males. Tatum (1992) argues that "the understanding of racism ... presents a serious challenge to the notion of the United States as a just society where rewards are based solely on one's merit. Such a challenge often creates discomfort in students" (p. 6). Some students believe that they have accumulated their success based on their sheer desire to achieve. They totally negate the idea that factors such as race, gender, ability, etc., can have a profound influence on their ability to obtain their goals. Thus the idea of understanding how these factors can influence student success can be challenging for them to fully grasp. Within the educational system, many challenges have been imposed on Black males, resulting in them starting at a disadvantage that carries forward into higher education settings. Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be a useful tool to investigate, explain, and confront the ways that race and racism influence Black males' experiences in college because it provides a lens that challenges commonly held assumptions about Black males (Senegal, 2011).

Critical Race Theory in Education

According to Giles and Hughes (2009), Critical Race Theory is a theoretical and practical tool that is often utilized to analyze issues of race and education. Gillborn

(2006) argues that it is more of a perspective than a theory: "[I]t is a set of interrelated beliefs about the significance of race/racism and how it operates in contemporary western society" (p. 19). CRT "focuses on issues of race and racism and adds complexity to the over-simplification of social issues" (Giles & Hughes, 2009, p. 689). According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), the ideal and significance of race theories are not priorities in the United States; however, the notion of race "continues to be a significant factor in determining inequality" (p. 48).

Yosso (2005) defines the role of Critical Race Theory in the educational world as "challenging the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses." He adds, "Critical Race Theory in education refutes dominant ideology and white privilege while validating and centering on the experiences of people of color" (p. 74). According to Solorzano and Yosso (2001), the utilization of Critical Race Theory is a strategy that explains the role of race and racism in education, thereby working to eliminate the presence of racism and ultimately other methods of subordination.

Despite the presence of these racial inequalities in the United States, the issue of race is still under-explored in this particular context. The stark inequalities in the American higher educational system should make analyzing racial issues an imperative in educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Hall and Rowan (2001), higher education has historically been a realm in which African American males have faced racism and experienced inequality, resulting in these men not succeeding in the educational setting (p. 3). CRT, therefore, becomes a valuable means of exploring and exposing the persistent inequalities of race and racism in education and providing a vivid picture of the real experiences of people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2005). As Harper,

Patton, & Wooden (2009) indicate, "Critical Race Theory provides an approach that challenges how the issue of racism has shaped and undermined policy efforts for African American student participation in higher education" (p. 390).

Theoretical Framework

Harper, Patton, & Wooden (2009) contend that there is no single definition for Critical Race Theory; however, scholars agree on the centrality of beliefs called tenets that comprise the theory: (1) racism is common, (2) dominant ideologies must be challenged, (3) interest convergence adds a further dimension, (4) recount their experiences through counter narratives, and (5) race is socially constructed. For purposes of this study, the researcher highlights three specific tenants that most inform the study. Those tenets are the following: racism is common, counter narratives, and interest convergence.

The first tenet relevant to this study is that "racism is common." Racism is an essential part of any explanation of how American society works. Delgado (1995) says that racism is "normal, not aberrant," adding that "because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture" (p. xiv). According to Gillborn (2006), because racism is embedded legally and culturally into American society, it is not rare. Even though the Civil Rights movement aided in the advancement of African Americans, racism still exists, and yet many people deny it. CRT acknowledges that racism is deeply rooted in everyday life and is experienced daily by African Americans (Giles & Hughes, 2009).

The second tenet that is relevant to this study is the concept of counter narratives. CRT scholars recognize that people of color who have been discriminated against possess

a special voice that needs to be heard (Matsuda, 1995). As Solorzano and Yosso (2001) contend, Critical Race Theory in education acknowledges "that the experiential knowledge of students of color is legitimate, and appropriate and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education" (p. 473). The stories and experiences shared by African Americans are rooted in their unique experiences and positions. Delgado (1995) argued that African Americans speak from a voice that is dominated by their experiences with racism.

Lynn & Parker (2002) contend that Critical Race Theory has allowed the personal experiences of racism to be uncovered using storytelling and narratives. Such engaging stories assist us in understanding what life is like for those of color, countering the stories of privileged Whites by providing insight into Blacks' lived experiences (Delgado & Stephanic, 2001; Giles, 2010). Storytelling encourages people of color to share their plights and perspectives. What can be gained from listening to the voices and the stories of experience is "the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 15). Knaus (2009) explains that, by establishing structures where students' experiences can be heard through their voices, the students can then create their "own understandings of knowledge to contradict the negative impacts of learning through a White dominant form of knowledge" (p. 142).

The third tenet that impacts this study is interest convergence. The concept of interest convergence suggests that society will not change unless the interests of the group that is in control and the group that is subordinate somehow converge. Su (2007) notes that interest convergence "predicts that dominant groups are unlikely to join anti-

racist campaigns unless it also serves their own self-interest" (p. 539). This principle explains why change is so difficult: because it requires the support of all involved. Bell explains, "The interests of African Americans and other people of color in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of Whites who are in policy-making positions" (Bell, 2004, p. 69).

For the purposes of this study, one aspect of Critical Race Theory is critically important: the necessity of Whites first identifying what the pros and cons are for their own self-interests in order for the initiatives to be successful for African Americans (Harper, 2009). Programs assisting students of color will not be successful unless minority groups and whites can see mutual benefit. There must be a significant intersection between what African Americans want and what the white elites believe they stand to gain. According to Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009), previous efforts to eliminate racism have been unsuccessful because they have not included sufficient convergence of interest between white elites and African Americans. Yosso (2005) believes that those in the field of education who seek to challenge social inequality must acknowledge that the tenets of Critical Race Theory can comprise the basis for their work (p. 74).

African American Males in Education

Pipeline in K-12

According to the *State of America's Children 2011* report, "[C]hildren of color are behind in every measure of a child's well-being and [are] in grave danger of entering the pipeline to prison rather than the pipeline to college" (p. ix). Staggering data from the report also revealed that children of color are more susceptible to health risks, inadequate

access to quality education, being placed in foster care, and ending up in the juvenile justice system. The report also indicated that "nearly 80 percent or more of Black public school students in the fourth, eighth and 12th grades are unable to read or do math at grade level compared to 50 percent or more of White children" (p. ix).

Black students are also more than three times as likely to be suspended from school as white students. Unfortunately, the image of a Black student in the K-12 system is tarnished from the very beginning of his or her educational journey. Statistics such as these, coupled with the fact of the "school to prison pipeline," are examples of phenomena in which policies and practices push students away from the classroom and into juvenile and criminal justice systems. There is an added responsibility on K-12 teachers, high school guidance counselors, and postsecondary faculty and administrators to address this lingering issue. In order to reduce inequities in education, specific training for teachers must be implemented to address the growing issues students bring with them to school.

Numerous studies have found that black males matriculate through their K-12 experience having taken non-academically challenging courses as compared to their White counterparts. The Black students thus are not prepared to compete in college, as hooks (2001) notes in her book *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*:

Literacy skills are not taught to [African American] males. Educational systems fail to impart or inspire learning in African American males of all ages. ... Many African American males graduate from high schools reading and writing on a third or fourth grade level. (p. 40-41)

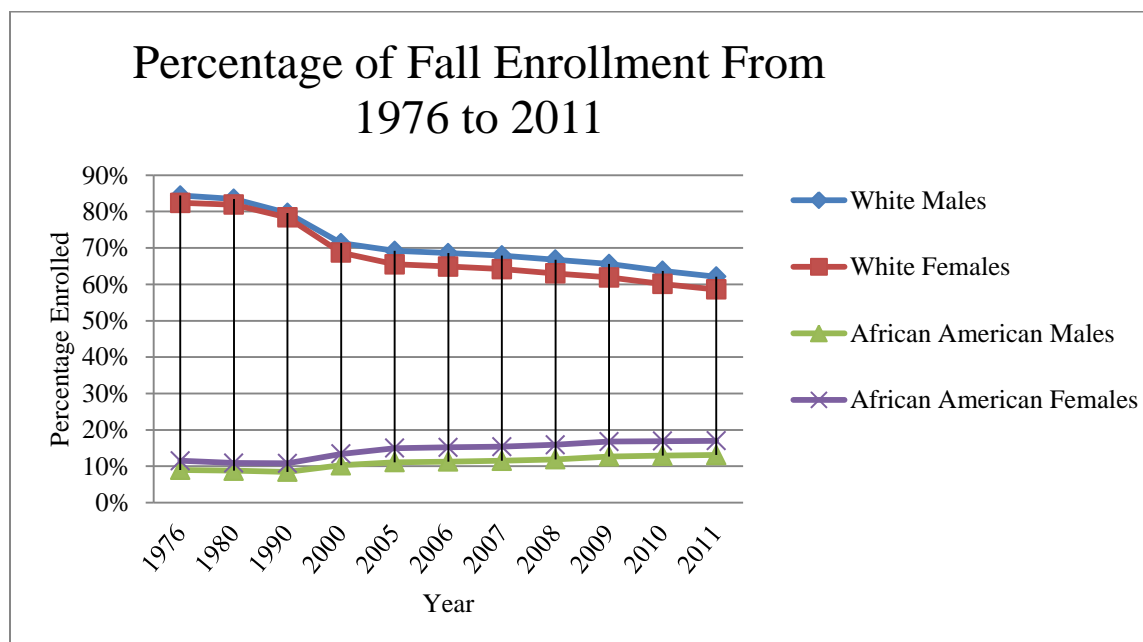
Hale (2001) found that the educational experience of African Americans impinge upon their ability to graduate from high school because of the lack of quality of education compared to their white counterparts. African American males are half as likely to be in

gifted and talented programs and a third less likely to take Advanced Placement mathematics and science courses (Glennon, 2002). Additionally, African American boys are less likely to graduate from high school or college than White males (Glennon, 2002).

Entering College

To add depth and breadth to this study, the researcher began by reviewing data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Data reflected the total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions by race/ethnicity and gender from 1976 through 2011. As seen below in Table 1, which reflects national enrollment data in degree-granting institutions of higher education by race and gender, Black male enrollment in institutions of higher education has slowly risen from 1976 to 2011. The figure ranges from about 9% to 13.01% of the total students enrolled in undergraduate studies on a national level. The enrollment of Black females has also increased slightly. By comparison, White male enrollment has steadily decreased, as has with White female enrollment. This data shows an incremental rise in the enrollment of Black males in institutions of higher education. Because Black males only account for a small percentage of the total number of students that enroll in college, colleges and universities have begun to address the issue of the low enrollment of Black males across the landscape of higher education.

TABLE 1: Fall undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting institutions nationally by race and sex: Selected years, (1976 through 2011).

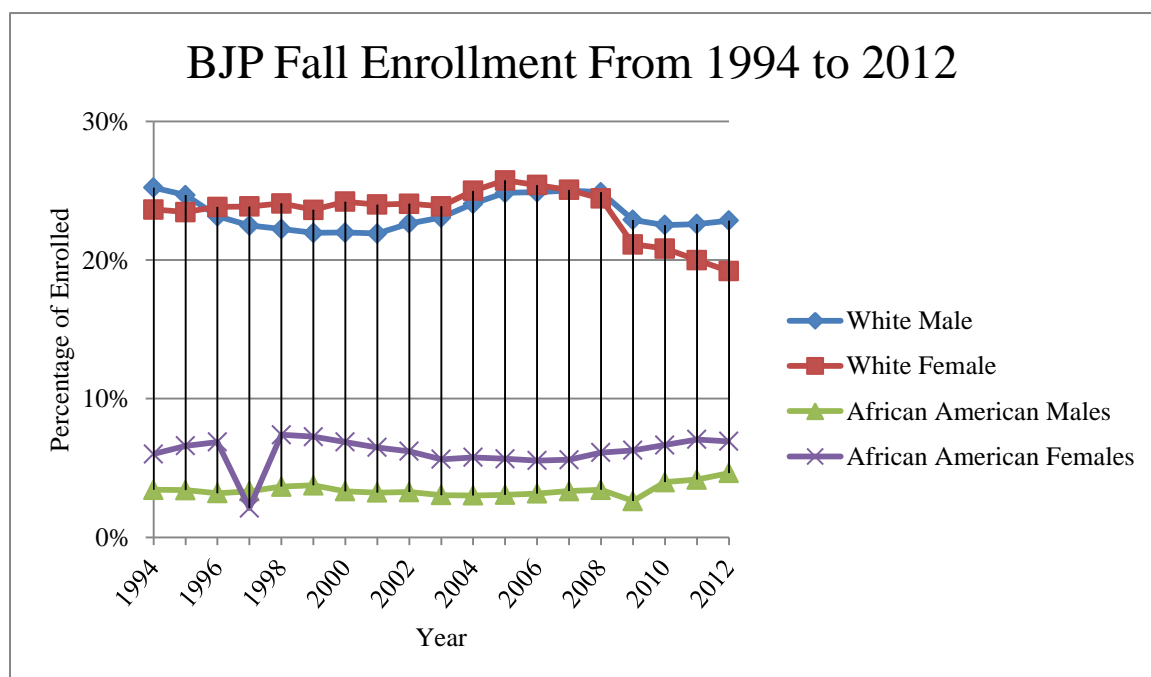


Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2012)

The present researcher was curious to see whether enrollment data found at BJP mirrored the national level mentioned above. A review of data compiled by the Office of Institutional Research at BJP revealed that although enrollment has increased each year from 1994 to 2012, the percentage of African American males enrolled has not increased in proportion to other racial or gender groups enrolled at BJP (see Table 2). Between the years of 1994 and 2012, there was a slight increase in enrollment of African American males; however, the increase mirrors the national trend of having this group enrolled at institutions of higher education at a rate lower than any other race or gender. African American female enrollment also decreased slightly in 1997, although it has gradually increased to the present level. The enrollment of White males has steadily increased over the past three years, although prior to those years, enrollment for White males fluctuated. Enrollment for Whites overall was stagnant, with moderate increases between 1994 and

2004. After 2004, Whites' enrollment jumped for two years before decreasing significantly to its current level. One would assume that as total enrollment increased, the enrollment of African American males would be likely to increase in proportion; however, this has not been the case for Black males at BJP.

TABLE 2: Fall undergraduate enrollment at BJP from 1994 to 2012.



Source: BJP Institutional Research Center (2013)

Table 2 shows gradual increases in the enrollment of Black males at BJP, based on the limited years recorded by the Office of Institutional Research. However, it is challenging to see, simply looking at the graph, the percentage difference in the gradual increase of Black males at BJP. From this observation, the researcher believes that it would be useful to understand the reasons for the changes in enrollment that occurred from year to year. Between the years 1994 and 2012, the percentage of undergraduate Black males enrolled full-time at BJP increased overall by 129% (from 532 in 1994 to

1,219 in 2012), as depicted in Tables 3 and 4 below. Table 4 depicts a more detailed synopsis of the percent increase of enrollment of Black males from year to year, showing those years where enrollment declined from the previous year as well as those years when enrollment increased.

TABLE 3: Percent difference between 1994 to 2012 of Black males at BJP.

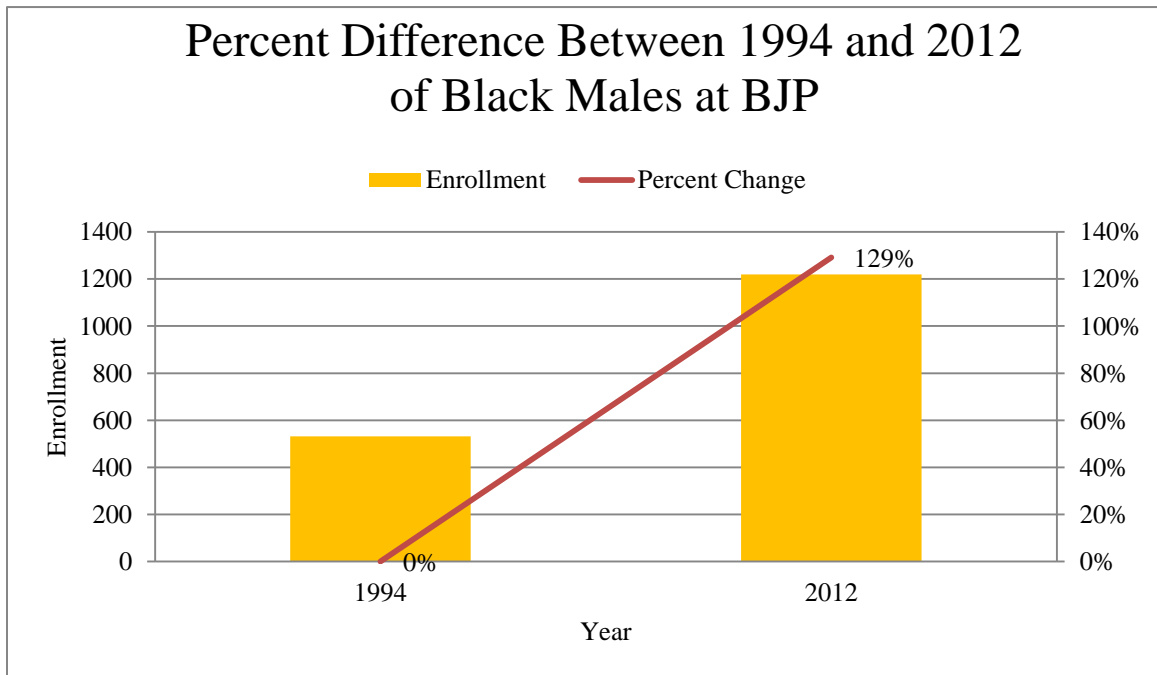
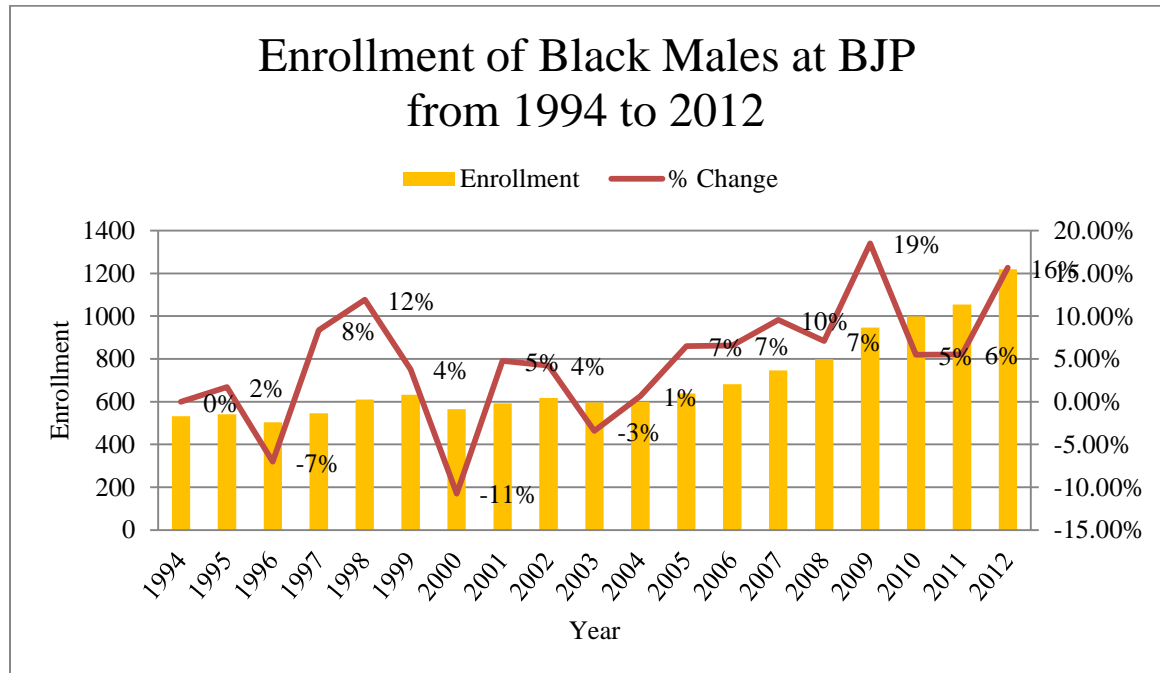
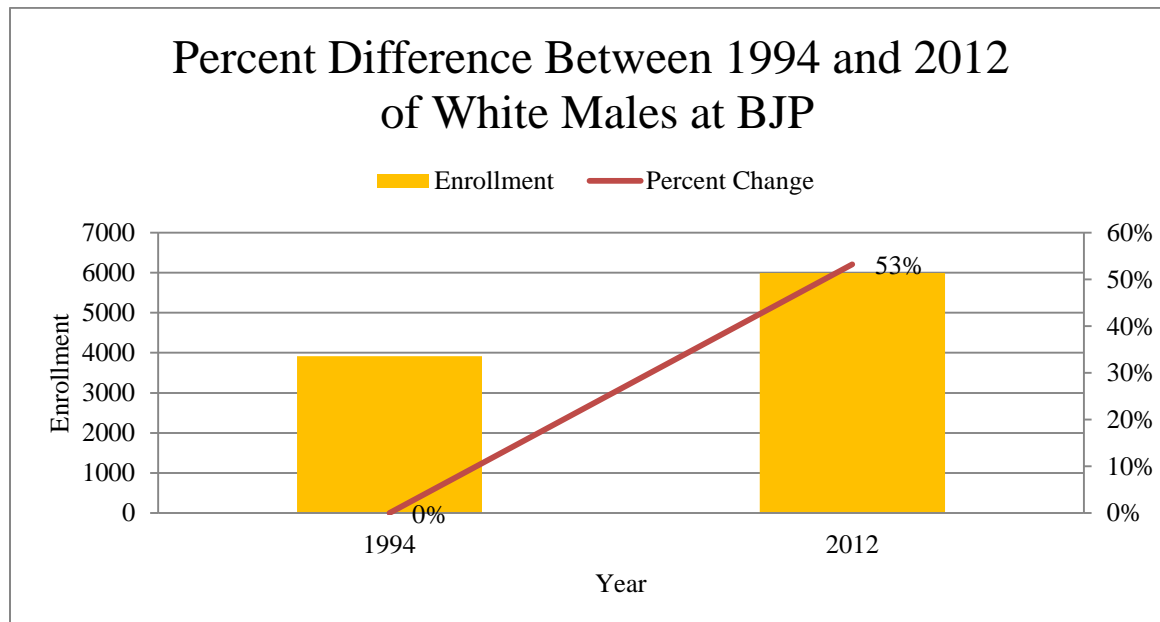


TABLE 4: Enrollment of Black males at BJP from 1994 to 2012.



Between the years 1994 and 2012, the percentage of undergraduate White males enrolled full time at BJP increased by 53%, as depicted in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5: Percent difference between 1994 and 2012 of White males at BJP.



Persistence and Retention

A critical issue facing institutions of higher education today revolves around students persisting to the degree. Retention and persistence in higher education are important because they affect the future of our society. The two concepts work in tandem. According to Berger and Lyon (2005), "retention" is the institution's ability to keep students from admission to graduation; similarly, Wyman (1997) defines retention as "the percent of entering students graduating or persisting in their studies at an institution" (p. 29). In educational research, "persistence" has been defined as the ability of students to graduate from a program (Lufi, Parish-Plass, & Cohen, 2003). For African American males, the word "persistence" can take on another meaning in the context of higher education, referring to how one continues steadfastly when opposition presents itself (Harper, 2012). The concepts of retention and persistence are similar, and for the purposes of this study, the two terms will be used interchangeably.

While the issue of persistence in higher education has been the topic of many studies, there is still more to learn about it. According to Tinto (1997), researchers still do not fully understand what factors affect persistence in higher education. Tinto (2006) notes that even "[t]hough some institutions have been able to make substantial improvements in the rate at which their students graduate, many have not" (p. 2). Problems with persistence are clearly evident when considering the difference between the numbers of African American males who enroll in college and those who actually matriculate to the degree (Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster, 1991). Many institutions have noticed that African American male students' retention and persistence rates have increased only slightly over the past thirty years. According to Noguera (2003), research has shown that African American males are in trouble. Given their circumstances and history, Noguera suggests that a relationship exists between African American male retention and the adversity that they face in society. More specifically, at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), African Americans encounter racism and feelings of being excluded from the campus community (Allen, 1992; Carter, 2006; Turner, 1994). Consequently Cuyjet (2006) suggests that "[t]he issues [including persistence] related to the condition of African American men in American society are far-reaching and complex" (p.4). Researchers and scholars alike have attempted to tackle the gargantuan task of improving enrollment and graduation rates.

For instance, Palmer and Young (2009) found that African American males are often discouraged from graduating from college because "they are less likely to yield a favorable return on their investment compared to White men" (p. 466-467). The study showed that the Bachelors degree of an African American male is valued less than the

Bachelors degree of a White man when it comes to potential earnings (Kunjufu, 2001; Palmer & Young, 2009). Palmer and Young suggested that African Americans do not want to invest the time necessary to graduate from college if their degrees do not place them on an equal playing field with White job applicants and employees.

Background Variables

Background variables are highly predictive of a student's persistence to degree (Simmons, 2013; Stage 1989). When students enter a collegiate institution, they arrive with certain characteristics, which help them to establish commitments to the university and their goal of matriculating (LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 1993). Many African American males enter college with different experiences and skill sets than their peers, and these differences can influence persistence. Tinto (1982) argued that "it is not elitist to recognize that not all those who enter are equally equipped either in skills (academic, social, or otherwise) and/or intellectual capacities to finish a given course of study" (p. 696). In other words, it is important to recognize that everyone who enters college will not possess the same intellectual or social capabilities. However, colleges and universities need to take responsibility for helping those who arrive less prepared to gain the skills they need to succeed.

Socioeconomic status of African American males is another variable that has been found to be a key determining factor in students' persistence in college. Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, and Royster (1991) found that the availability of financial resources is a forecaster of persistence because money can be correlated with "support, academic success, [and ability to] monitor academic behaviors, and [it can] provide continual

encouragement" to the student who is financially secure (p. 99). Studies have shown that for African Americans attending PWIs, the higher the student's socioeconomic status, the better his or her chances of academic success and retention will be (Carter, 2006; Feagin, Hernan, & Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Furr & Ellin, 2002; Robertson & Mason, 2008; St. John, Carter, Chung, & Musoba, 2006). Undoubtedly, the availability of a variety of resources, including financial resources, is crucial to African American males' success in college (Ellington & Frederick, 2010).

Carter (2006) revealed in an American Council on Education study that "71 percent of the people surveyed believe that college is not affordable for most families and [that] 83 percent of the African American respondents believe so" (p. 41). There is a strong likelihood that students from low-income backgrounds will have to work while completing their studies, which in turn may affect their ability to succeed at academic pursuits (Charles et al, 2004; Robertson & Mason, 2008). For African American males, cost is a major factor that can keep them from even attending a university, never mind graduating. The cost of college negatively affects some students' ability to persist to the degree (Cabrera, Stampen, & Hansen, 1990; Carter, 2006; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005).

Cognitive Variables

For African American students, both cognitive variables and noncognitive variables affect persistence and retention (Schwartz & Washington, 2002). Cognitive variables represent a quantitative view of collegiate success, while noncognitive variables account for the qualitative view. Cognitive variables measure academic success as defined by standardized tests, grade point averages (GPA), and grades (Schwartz &

Washington, 2002). The standardized tests include the Student Assessment Test, known as the SAT, and the American College Admissions Test, known as the ACT. Schwartz and Washington contend that while standardized tests have previously been utilized as entrance exams for the purpose of admissions, they have become "predictors of college success" (p. 356).

Academic failure can have an effect on persistence early on; as such failures can become stumbling blocks that keep students from even graduating high school (Davis, 2003; Garibaldi, 1992; Palmer & Young, 2009). Achievement in high school, including grades from high school, is the greatest predictor of how well a student will do academically in persisting to the Bachelor's degree (Schwartz & Washington, 2002). Grades were found to have a positive correlation with persistence for African American students in college (Carter, 2006; Hall & Rowan, 2001; St. John, Paulsen, and Carter, 2006). Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, and Royster (1991) found that students with higher grades also had more academic and non-academic options available to them. They were able to take more rigorous courses, engage in extracurricular activities such as studying abroad and conducting research, and take part in unique experiences. Thus, their chances at persisting to the degree improved.

Noncognitive Variables

Several noncognitive variables help to determine persistence and retention. For the purposes of this study, the researcher primarily considered five noncognitive variables, to be discussed in this section: integration, support and mentorship, a sense of belonging, faculty engagement, and motivation.

Social Integration

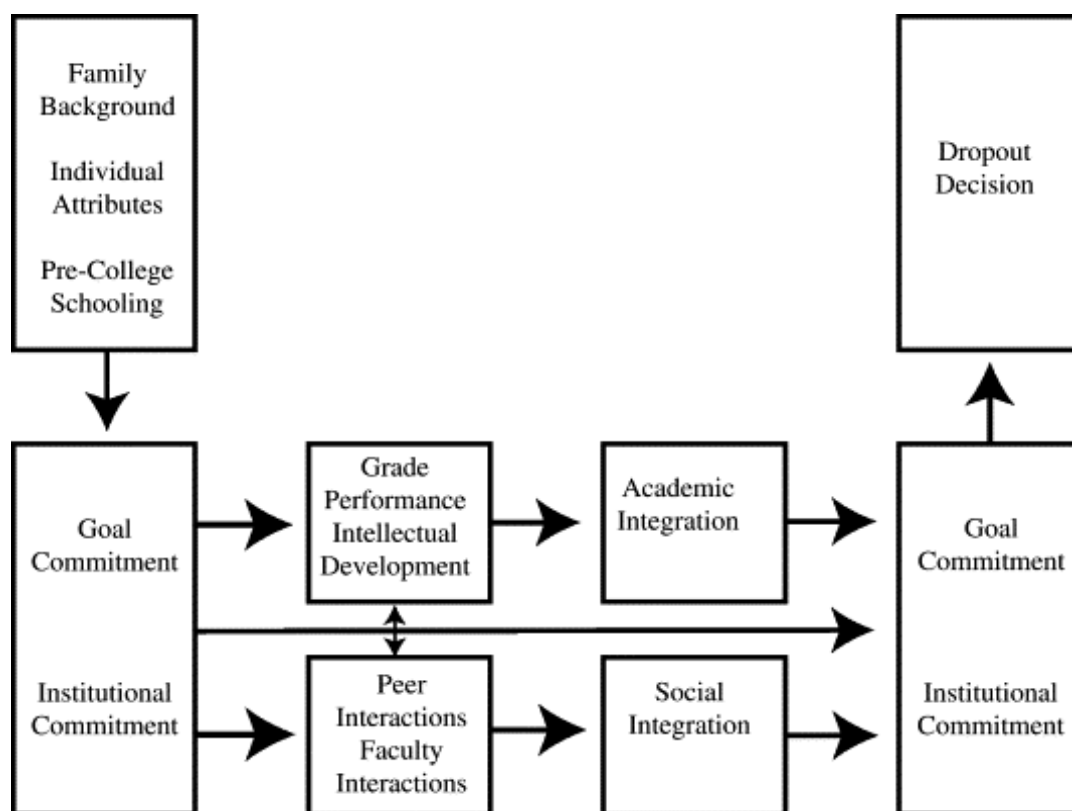
Social integration can be defined as a sense of connection with or attachment to other students, faculty, or staff at one's institution; that sense of attachment is based on common interests (Simmons, 2013; Stage & Hossler, 2000; Taylor & Miller, 2002; Thomas, 2000). Literature on collegiate experience and persistence implies that the "nature of students' cultural and social interactions" (Ellington and Frederick, 2010, p. 63) is directly related to the persistence and retention of students (Allen, 1987; Astin, 1984; Mallette & Cabrera, 1991; Nora, 1987; Tinto, 1997; Palmer & Maramba, 2012; Palmer & Young, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Robertson & Mason, 2008; Simmons, 2013; Stage, 1989; Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1982; Tinto, 1993). The greater a student's involvement on campus (including integration into the campus setting), the more likely he or she is to persist towards graduation.

A student's integration and involvement in campus activities is extremely important to remaining at the school (Kuh, 1995; Carter, 2006). According to Wilson (2000), research indicates that retention depends on "a student's fit or niche" (p. 175) with an institution. "If you look at what is happening in college communities, you see very few African American males involved in the mainstream of campus life" (Morgan, 1996, p. 17). The challenges that Black males face in finding their niche on campus may negatively affect their ability to persist.

Palmer and Young (2009) discovered that "student involvement fostered a sense of commitment to the campus and facilitated [students'] time management skills and ... helped the participants become familiar with campus resources" (p. 471). By becoming highly involved in what is happening on campus, African American males can benefit

from available opportunities and increase their level of persistence (Bonous-Hammarth, 2000; Carter, 2006; Palmer & Young, 2009; Simmons, 2013; Tinto, 1987).

Tinto (1993) proposed a theoretical model that can be found in (Figure 2) of student retention emphasizing the importance of academic and social integration. His model shows that the integration of the student is the most important factor of persistence. It is the interactions between the student and the academic and social structures of the institution that enable the student to become more engaged and connected, and therefore more likely to persist to matriculation. Retention will be more likely if the relationships between the student and faculty members are positive and supportive (Marshall, 2008).



Source: Rovai (2003)

FIGURE 1: A conceptualization of Tinto's model of student retention

Tinto (1993) argues that the major challenge to persistence is commitment to the institution and its goals. A student's commitments have a great impact on how he or she will interact with and become integrated into the university both socially and academically; therefore, the higher level of student integration, the greater his or her commitment to the university and to graduating (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Stage, 1989; Thomas, 2000). Commitment was found to be a greater predictor of persistence than strong academic performance. Tinto (1993) describes those students who do not do well academically, but who are highly committed, as being more likely to persist until they are academically ineligible to remain in school than those who are less committed but who are performing well. Simmons (2013) revealed that for African American males, "[I]ntent to earn a graduate degree was influential to retention and the potential to achieve occupational goals" (p. 71). Desire to attend graduate school has a direct relationship with persistence (Simmons, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008; Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster, 1991). If they set high goals, African American male students are more likely to work harder to achieve those goals. African American males who tend to have unclear goals and enter college without expectations (George, 2011) face challenges that make them more likely not to graduate college.

Support and Mentorship

Tinto (1999) found that students need some type of support in order to persist to the degree. This support can be in the form of academic, personal, and financial structures. Support from relationships contributes to the overall success of African American males persisting to the degree (Strayhorn, 2008). According to Allen (1987), African American students at PWIs "cry out for more supportive environments" (p. 30).

Ellington and Frederick (2010) found that peer support networks were critical to African American student retention, aiding them both socially and academically. The support of peers allows students to collaborate with each other more and form study groups, improving their ability to learn and retain information. Peer relationships among African American males are therefore essential components of support networks for all students who want to persist to graduation (Cuyjet, 2006). Thomas (2000) showed that relationships among students had a positive impact on integration and persistence. The present study aims to show that the establishment of positive relationships through a brotherhood for Black males can create a supportive environment that promotes persistence to the degree. Palmer and Gassman (2008) agree that supportive environments tend to foster successful academic experiences and higher graduation rates.

In the higher education setting, mentoring can be defined as the establishment of an intentional relationship between individuals (a mentor who is an experienced professional and a mentee who is a student) that is intended to promote growth and help the mentee to define goals and understand experiences (Shandley, 1989; LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). It is a key form of support. According to Morgan, "Often the reasons students fail are not academic but things like knowing how to set priorities, being balanced in male-female relations, and not really being able to be sacrificing" (Morgan, 1996, p. 16).

LaVant, Anderson, and Tiggs (1997) suggest that mentoring for African American male students is particularly crucial given the difficulty of integrating this population into the campus environment. In fact, according to Hoyte and Collett (1993), the close relationships that are established between African American males and their mentors are a strong factor in the positive attitudes of the males and the integration of such students.

Wilson (2000) argues that incorporating mentors on campuses is an "immediate solution" to persistence and a step toward increasing Black male retention (p. 175).

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is essential to the African American male collegiate experience. Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods (2009) contend that the integration of students into a university creates a sense of belonging to the institution and the community, which is "an important precursor to desirable outcomes such as increased commitment and persistence" (p. 650). Further, research has revealed that African Americans experience anxiety at PWIs as a result of negative encounters with white faculty and students (Carter, 2006; Feagin, Hernan, & Imani, 1996; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Consequently, these students do not feel welcomed or a part of the collegiate scene. Positive encounters would increase the likelihood that students felt that the institution identifies them as valued members (Tinto, 1999) of the college. Research has revealed that African American male students' sense of belonging is essential to persisting to the degree (Feagin, 1998; Feagin & Bartsch, 1993; Lerner, 1993; Hall & Rowan, 2001; Robertson & Mason, 2008). The greater the sense of belonging, the more motivated a student will be to persist (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Hall & Rowan, 2001).

Faculty Engagement

Research has shown that presence of teachers that are caring, motivating, and who hold high expectations for their students is needed as students persist to the degree (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Palmer and Young (2009) found that the likelihood of retaining African American males is higher when faculty support African American males by demonstrating concern and empathy and making themselves "available and accessible"

(p. 473). It is essential that African American males create positive relationships with faculty (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Quaye, Tambascia, & Talesh, 2009; Robertson & Mason, 2008; Simmons, 2013). Positive relationships with minority faculty, in particular, help African American students to persist to the degree. Moreover, African American males who establish positive relationships with white faculty tend to have better experiences at PWIs (Robertson, 1995; Robertson & Mason, 2008; Simmons, 2013; Turner & Myers, 2000). These relationships help to "facilitate healthy social and personal development amongst African American college students" (Robertson & Mason, 2008, p. 69).

Allen (1987) argues that faculty serve as the liaisons between students and the university. Tinto (1999) contends that in order for these students to persist and graduate, they must be in a collegiate environment that fosters motivation and learning while communicating high expectations to succeed. Communicated expectations must be clear and consistent (Tinto, 1999). Students need to be both guided in a way that will lead them to their ultimate goal of graduating and provided the necessary tools to persist.

Faculty must think outside of the box in order to be helpful to students in this way. Faculty and administrators must step outside of their designated roles and put forth the effort to get to know African American male students outside of the classroom (Allen 1987; Palmer & Maramba, 2012). Authentic caring is described by Palmer and Maramba (2012) as "consistently displaying interest and concern for Black men's well-being and success in college" (p. 104). Examples of authentic caring occur "when faculty and admin check-in with students periodically, advocate on behalf of students during extreme need and crisis, and are intrusive in their advising of students" (p.104). African American

males need to believe that faculty are concerned about their well-being and academic success in order to be motivated by faculty to persist to the degree (Noguera, 2003).

Motivation

Motivation is a significant factor in the retention of African American males (Abel 1966; Astin 1964; Hall & Rowan, 2001; Palmer & Young, 2009; Smith, 1991; Stage, 1989). Palmer and Young (2009) contend that "while the university must do its part to ensure student success by providing the necessary resources, students must motivate themselves to attend classes, study, and seek support" (p. 475). The responsibility lies not only with the institution, but also with the student, who needs to be intrinsically motivated, accountable, and willing to knock down roadblocks to his success (Palmer & Young, 2009; Pelham, 1991; Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster, 1991). Students must do their part in making sure that they can handle any obstacles that come between them and the degree. Palmer and Young (2009) argued that students must be willing to make an investment in graduating, noting that "universities can only do so much" because "students must go to class, seek support, interact with faculty, form relationships with peers, staff, administrators, and faculty, get involved on campus[,] and manage time" (p. 477). Students must be active participants, motivated to persist (Noguera, 2003). Essentially, African American males are, and must see themselves as, players in their own futures.

Aspiration is essential to African American males' journey to persist to graduation (Simmons, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008). African American males have to want to achieve and set attainable goals for themselves. They must believe in themselves in order to persevere to the degree (Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster, 1991). Research shows that the

more effort students exhibit, the greater likelihood they will achieve academic success and graduate (Kaufman & Creamer, 1991; Ory & Braskamp, 1988; Pace, 1984; Tinto, 1997).

Institutional Support Services

In order to better assist African American males with persistence and matriculation to graduation, strategies and programs must be designed and implemented that address the issue (Allen, 1987). Tinto (1982) argues that more institutional efforts must be put into place in order to promote persistence and retention. The purposes of these programs are to allow an opportunity for those who are at a disadvantage, particularly African American males, to have the support and resources that they require in order to persist to the degree.

Tinto (1999) argues that institutions must make "enhancing student retention" (p. 5) a priority and create programs and activities that address the problem. Hall and Rowan (2001) suggest that institutions must sit at the table and create programs that help these African American males, and the institutions will ultimately gain support by including the African American male students in the process. Hall and Rowan also argue that institutional efforts must be democratic in nature while allowing both the students and administrators to be involved (2001). This in turn will garner more commitment from students (Hall & Rowan, 2001, Tinto, 1982). Essentially, institutional support programs need to be informative, garnering feedback and involving all stakeholders in the decision making process in order to be effective.

Research has established that African American males have the lowest retention rates of their peers and, in general, require support if they are going to persist to the

degree (Cuyjet, 1997; McClure, 2006; Robertson & Mason, 2008). Robertson and Mason (2008) contend that due to society's negative expectations of African American males, they are at a disadvantage from the moment that they step foot on campus, and that "therefore it is imperative that campus administrators, if they are truly committed to the success of these students, provide programs (e.g. tutoring, mentoring, social adjustment) for African American males" (p.70).

Increasing our understanding of Black males in the collegiate setting is of paramount importance in developing effective strategies to retain them on campus. Exploring how they cultivate relationships with faculty and staff members may increase the institutional awareness that is necessary for improving the deplorable rates at which these students are retained at institutions across the country. Tinto (1982) called for adequate models of institutional support efforts in order to combat retention. He concluded that those "institutions that act to improve the total quality of their educational activities are more likely not only to retain more of their abler students but also to attract a greater share of students during the next two decades" (Tinto, 1982, p. 698). The program must be implemented and managed properly in order to be effective, however (Tinto, 1982). Tinto (1982) postulates that successful institutional efforts should involve a commitment to help the students over a period of time.

As an example of what institutions can be doing to improve retention, the Todd A. Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male at The Ohio State University warrants close examination. Per information found on their website and through communication with representatives from the Center, in 2002, the performance of African American male students in college led concerned administrators at The Ohio

State University to implement an experimental effort to better understand, and possibly improve retention and graduation rates for, this subpopulation of undergraduate students.

The Center developed a series of initiatives, including early arrival programs, retreats, lecture series, opportunities to participate in leadership institutes, mentoring of middle school students, roundtable discussions, and academic support groups, all designed to help Black males connect with faculty and staff in meaningful interactions. Because the Center's focus is on research and evaluation, the members constantly examine and evaluate their program participants based on the interventions implemented. Through the efforts of administrators, the program has continued to evolve. This is just one example of an institution of higher education that is reaching out to African American males with the hopes of altering the trajectory of at least one young man's fate. In Figure 2, the researcher has provided a list of other institutional initiatives designed to bolster retention and graduation rates among Black males in higher education.

Institutional Initiatives throughout higher education	
Kennesaw State University	African American Male Initiative
Morgan State University	Morgan Male Initiative on Leadership and Excellence (MILE) Program
Philander Smith College	Black Male Initiative
North Carolina Central University	Centennial Scholars Program
University of Maryland at College Park	The Nyumburu Black Male Initiative Program

FIGURE 2: Institutional initiatives throughout higher education

Institutional Initiatives throughout higher education	
University of West Georgia	The Center for African American Male Research Success and Leadership
University of California, Los Angeles	Black Male Institute
Georgia Institute of Technology	Providing Resources to Ignite Male Excellence (GT PRIME)
Southern Polytechnic State University	Project MENtorship

FIGURE 2: (Continued)

One can see that Black male persistence is a consistent problem throughout the country and that institutions have responded by developing programs which provide support for these students. However, as Cheatham, Tomlinson, and Ward, (1990) point out, "[O]ne major factor in many programs' failure is that they were designed and implemented without a clear understanding of the unique academic and psychosocial needs of African American students" (p. 494). Institutions must pay critical attention to the initial design of these programs in order to ensure that they fit the needs of the students they are intended to serve.

According to Allen (1987), institutional support services must coordinate with other programs and establish a complete system of retention with multiple players in order to be effective. All institutional support efforts must also define success in terms of outcomes that are measurable. Hall and Rowan (2001) recommend that impact assessments be conducted in order to provide adequate feedback for the improvement of the effort, thus establishing a platform for needed programmatic changes.

Palmer & Maramba (2012) found that while institutional efforts are essential to student retention, their effectiveness is largely dependent upon the program supporting the students and showing them that they care about their wellbeing. According to Noguera (2003), in order to truly be effective, institutional initiatives must counter factors that tell African American males that education is not important or that it is not necessary. The initiatives must be theoretically based and must follow best practices that have been successful at other schools.

Institutions are making more of an effort to include African Americans in their populations, while improving the educational experience and thus retention. Learning communities, study groups, first-year interest groups, and mentoring programs are examples of the various retention efforts that institutions can implement in order to increase African American male persistence (Carter, 2006; Myers 2003; Simmons, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008).

Institutions have begun to realize that recruitment is only part of the answer to ensuring educational opportunities and persistence for African American males in higher education; these students must receive greater attention because retention is extremely significant as well. There is an ongoing need for institutions of higher learning to evaluate the effectiveness of how well African Americans are being served and develop and maintain programs to better assist students with matriculation (Tatum, 1997).

There is not yet sufficient research on the effects of institutional support structures on retention of African American male students. While there is a plethora of research about retention, there is little literature regarding the role that institutional support structures play on retention and on how they affect retention. Most studies reviewed here

highlight individual persons, isolated experiences, and/or resources as the major factors affecting the college experience. However, Harper's (2012) study on Black male student success in higher education sounds the alarm for the need to connect and explore the experiences of Black males enrolled in higher education institutions today. The report indicated that many programs are being started across the landscape of higher education, but ironically, very few studies are actually exploring the impact these programs have on the student. This fact is echoed in George's (2011) study of programmatic factors that affect African American male retention. He contended that institutional commitment and the creation of initiatives were important in African American male retention; however, the actual role of institutional support structures on African American male retention has been little addressed.

Carter (2006) reported in an American Council on Education study that "71 percent of the people surveyed believe that college is not affordable for most families, and 83 percent of the African American respondents believe so" (p. 40). There is a strong likelihood that students from low-income backgrounds will have to work while completing their studies, which in turn may affect their academic pursuits (Charles et al, 2004; Robertson & Mason, 2008). For African American males, cost is a major discouragement from even attending a university, not just from graduating. The cost of college has a negative effect on students' ability to persist to the degree. (Cabrera, Stampen, and Hansen, 1990; Carter, 2006; St. John, Paulsen, and Carter, 2005).

Much of the previous research on this subject has focused on Black males who were unsuccessful in higher education, but researchers must counterbalance this scholarship by looking at Black males who have managed to successfully matriculate

through their collegiate experience despite the various pitfalls they may have encountered along the way (Harper, 2010). Moreover, the majority of the current literature on Black males in the collegiate environment concentrates on individual factors that enhance or prohibit these students' success. This dissertation, by contrast, is intended to bridge the gap in knowledge of institutional support programs by exploring successful Black males' perspectives on the impact of institutional support services on the collegiate experience.

Summary

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) wrote there is a "need for a critical race theoretical perspective to cast a new gaze on the persistent problems of racism in schooling" (p. 60). Critical Race Theory forces us to face head on the notion of race and the shortcomings of racial inequality as a whole within higher education. The race problem is faced head on by asking through research the pivotal question of "What are the experiences and responses of those whose stories are often distorted and silenced?" In the words of Solorazo and Yosso (2002), "In documenting the voices of people of color, our work tells their stories" (Solorazo & Yosso, 2002, p. 36).

Institutional support structures are important factors in the overall story of the development of African American males and their path to matriculation. However, there is scant literature that discusses the impact of institutional support structures on the perceptions of African American male students on their college experiences. More research must be done in order to improve the effectiveness of institutional initiatives so that persistence and retention might be increased. By improving persistence and retention rates, we produce students who are well rounded and possess mental fortitude. After four years of college, the student enters back into society equipped and prepared to challenge

the status quo as a leader ready to make a difference. A more comprehensive understanding of how educational initiatives can assist African American students can occur by listening to their experiences and responding to their needs (Tatum, 1997). Unfortunately, opportunities for African Americans to share their experiences and be heard are still rare, but this study provided such an opportunity. Chapter Three will identify and describe the methodological approach and research design the researcher used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The existing literature indicates a need for mentoring, counseling, and better outreach for Black males at PWIs, and indeed, higher education institutions have responded by developing intervention programs. It is not uncommon for such initiatives to be evaluated quantitatively at the end of the academic year. In a numbers-driven society, demonstrating the program's outcomes through numbers and statistical analyses can be beneficial. For instance, if a program can show that 9 out of 10 students successfully matriculated through a program in part because of the planned intervention, the program can be counted as a success. However, numbers are strictly black and white. They do not reflect the rich story that could be gathered from the individual participants who engaged in the program. Few studies have used qualitative research methods to investigate African American male students' perceptions of the institutional support service designed to assist them in persisting through college.

According to Harper and Kuh (2007), "As higher education becomes more complex and expectations for documenting effectiveness increase, more needs to be known about the specifics" (p.5). Narratives of the participants can provide those specifics and increase researchers' and higher education officials' understanding of the factors that influence the impact that institutional support services have on Black male students' retention and successful matriculation. As Harper and Kuh further explain,

Qualitative methods cannot answer every assessment question, but they can be used alone or in concert with quantitative approaches to help explain in more

detail what different groups of students are learning and experiencing and, equally important, the meanings students and others make of collegiate life and the various factors that affect institutional quality. (Harper & Kuh, 2007, p. 12).

The purpose of this study was to explore black male students' perceptions of the role that institutional support services play in their retention and matriculation. The research questions were as follows:

Research Questions

1. How do Men Built with Character participants perceive the program's impact on their collegiate experience?
2. How does the program facilitate academic and social integration for program participants?
3. What are the key dimensions of an Institutional Support Service program aimed at the retention of Black undergraduate males?

This study adds to the growing body of rich and complex qualitative data on Black males and, as such, can assist higher education professionals and faculty members in their efforts to gain greater insight into the perceptions of Black males.

This chapter explains in detail the research design used to conduct this study. The research design, including the questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions, was adapted from Oliver's (2008) study, entitled "Exploring the utilization of institutional support structures by black males on a predominantly white campus." The present chapter includes a detailed description of the sample selection, data collection, and data analysis. It also discusses the trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations, and benefits and risks to the participants and to society.

Research Design

Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) suggests that "qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context perceive them" (p.12). This researcher used a case study research methodology in order to gain a deeper perspective and further understand Black males' perceptions of the role that institutional support services play in aiding Black male students' retention. The rationale for doing a case study is that such a method enables the researcher to describe, to explain, or to evaluate (Yin, 2012). In the present case, a qualitative research study was conducted using an embedded case study methodology (Yin, 2009). Multiple subunits of analyses were analyzed in order to make possible an understanding of the participants' perceptions of the program under examination.

A case study is an "empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a 'case'), set within its real-world context" (Yin, 2009, p. 18). As Mitchell (1983) defines a case study, it is "a detailed examination of an event (or series of related events) which the analyst believes exhibits (or exhibit) the operation of some identified general theoretical principle" (p. 26). The case study method enables the researcher to better understand the context of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2009). Marshall and Rossman (2006) proposed that, in a case study, "because thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds are involved, the researcher need[s] to understand the deeper perspectives that could be captured through head-on interactions" (p.53). The present researcher, realizing that context matters in understanding the phenomenon under exploration, interviewed Black male undergraduates about their experiences with an

institutional support service called "Men Built with Character" (pseudonym). By using in-depth, individual, and focus group interviews, the researcher was afforded the opportunity to delve into the case under exploration through the lens of each participant. Thus was confirmed Yin's (2013) argument that "the subunits add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, which ultimately enhance the insights into the single case" (p. 46). Additional methods in the case study included a demographic questionnaire administered to the student participants and a search for archival documents related to the six-year-old Men Built with Character program.

Site Selection

BJP (pseudonym) is a public urban research institution in the southeastern United States. According to the Office of Public Relations, it was one of many universities founded immediately after World War II to satisfy returning veterans' demands for higher education. It has grown from its initial offering of evening classes in the facilities of a high school for 278 freshmen and sophomore students, to having a student enrollment of more than 26,000 students in the fall of 2012. The University currently has seven professional colleges and offers 19 doctoral programs, 64 master's degree programs and 86 bachelor's degrees. It employs more than 900 full-time faculty members and has more than 90,000 living alumni (Metropolitan Research University History, 2012).

At BJP, there are four programs housed within the Office of Multicultural Academic Services, each program designed to increase the retention and graduation of minority students. "Men Built with Character" (pseudonym) is one of the programs. It was initially piloted by ten Black male undergraduates, a Program Coordinator, and an Assistant Coordinator at BJP in the spring of 2007. The purpose of the pilot program was

to help Black males successfully matriculate through their collegiate careers at BJP and produce accomplished graduates who are prepared for post-college life. The institutionalization of mentoring for Black males was believed to be a valuable first step in reversing the trend of poor persistence in higher education; thus, the program was developed.

The researcher was specifically interested in looking at institutional initiatives designed to improve the overall presence of Black males on campus. The Men Built with Character program was chosen because it is the only program at BJP that satisfies the following criteria: 1) it is an institutional initiative for minority students, 2) it is an initiative specifically designed for Black males, and 3) Black males can participate in the program throughout the duration of the collegiate experience.

Participants

In order to capture a diverse range of perceptions, the researcher involved African American male students who ranged from first-year students to graduating seniors.

Sample Selection Criteria

Student participants were chosen through a purposive and snowball sampling process. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) define purposive sampling as "the process of selecting a sample that is believed to be representative of a given population" (p.136), while snowball sampling is "selecting a few people who fit a researcher's needs, then using those participants to identify additional participants" (p.137). The study set out to learn about the perceptions of Black males specifically; therefore, the researcher intentionally set parameters within the sample selection process that would enable him to recruit the necessary participants through purposive sampling. Anticipating potential

challenges with recruiting the intended number of participants needed for the study through purposive sampling alone, the researcher also used snowball sampling by asking the participants who volunteered to identify additional participants who might take part in the study.

The eligibility criteria for participants were as follows:

1. Self-identified as a Black or African American male
2. Attends BJP as an undergraduate
3. Attends the majority of Men Built with Character program meetings and events
4. Has obtained at least 12 academic credits and has a minimum grade point average of 2.0 (the university guidelines for being in good academic standing) or higher at the beginning of the study.

Additionally, one of the founders and the current program coordinator were interviewed to provide greater understanding of the program's history and components. The researcher intentionally set the GPA requirement as such because he desired to study students who were successful in their academic pursuits. Much of the literature today focuses on improving the achievement gaps between Black males and others (Coley, 2011; Brown, 2011; Howard, 2008; Anderson, 2008). However, this study employs Harper's (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework. By looking at students who have higher GPAs, the researcher desired to inform administrators, practitioners, and other constituents about the experiences of successful Black males in hopes of taking various aspects of their experience and replicating what is learned in order to support students who fall below the university threshold for being in good academic standing.

A brief questionnaire was administered (APPENDIX A) to develop a demographic profile of the student participants. The questionnaire provided, among other

information, the following: date of birth, hometown/state, major, classification, GPA, parent/legal guardian highest level of education, and how long the person has been a part of Men Built with Character; the questionnaire also included a satisfaction survey. The chart below gives a description of the background of each person who participated in this study. Ten students participated in the focus group, and of that number, seven participated in the individual interview. There were two non-student participants.

Name	Major	Age	Hometown	Yr. in School	GPA	Transfer	Years in Program
Chuck	Political Science & Sociology	24	Charlotte, NC	Sr.	2.91	Yes	2
Jerry	Graphic Design	21	Raleigh, NC	Jr.	3.0	Yes	1
Joshua	Business Finance	20	New Orleans, LA	So.	3.01	Yes	1
Chancellor	Political Science & Communication Studies	20	Wilson, NC	So.	3.1	No	2
Traven	Political Science	22	Charlotte, NC	Jr.	2.7	No	3
Chris	Pre-Business	20	Winston-Salem, NC	Fr.	2.89	No	1
Makinley	Exercise Science & Applied Anthropology	21	Kingston, NY	Jr.	3.89	No	3
Woody	Systems Engineering	21	Nassau, Bahamas	Jr.	3.75	No	3
Harry	Pre-Kinesiology	19	Winston-Salem, NC	Fr.	3.21	No	1
James Frankie	Pre-Business	20	Greensboro, NC	Fr.	3.13	No	1

FIGURE 3: Student participant description (Gray highlighted students participated in focus group only, non-highlighted students participated in both the focus group and individual interview)

Name	Role	Gender	Race	Years at Institution
Terri Green	Program Founder	Female	African American	7
Danny McDonald	Program Coordinator	Male	African American	5

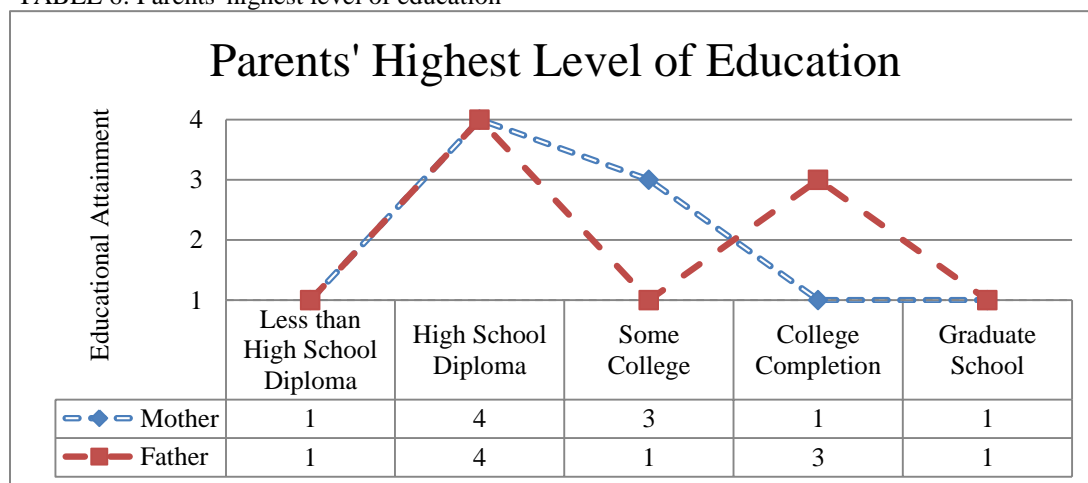
FIGURE 4: Non-student participant description

A thorough analysis of the questionnaire enabled the researcher to draw conclusions from the information collected from the participants. The three transfer students used their prior experiences in college before they were accepted into BJP as a foundation for how they would take advantage of what BJP had to offer. All three of them spoke at great length about the limited resources at their previous institutions and used those experiences to guide their strategies at BJP. By contrast, the participants who came to BJP out of high school had a very different drive than those that transferred. Both groups expressed wanting to succeed at all cost. However, two out of the three who had transferred acknowledged that coming to BJP was a sort of second chance. These young men had played around in high school and not taken school seriously; therefore, they had had to go elsewhere and prove themselves before they could come to BJP. All seven who had come directly to BJP expressed taking their experience for granted slightly. They knew that many of their peers had not gotten into BJP initially, but this knowledge did not push them to do their best. On average, based on GPAs, the participants in the study were more successful academically than the students in the program who did not participate in the study. The overall average GPA of all 100 males in the program was 2.97. The overall average GPA of the males within this study was a 3.15. This does not present a problem for this study, because initially, the researcher indicated the desire to study academically successful students.

The participants in this study also included several first generation college students. However, that topic did not come up much in conversation with the participants. Regardless of whether a parent had not attended college, had attended some college, or had completed a degree program, the participants all mentioned that the desire to do

better than their parents had had an impact on their decision to enroll in college in general. In addition, outside factors such as the desire to defy the odds and the desire to be a role model for others also influenced participants' decision to go to college. Below is a chart that displays participant's parents' education levels.

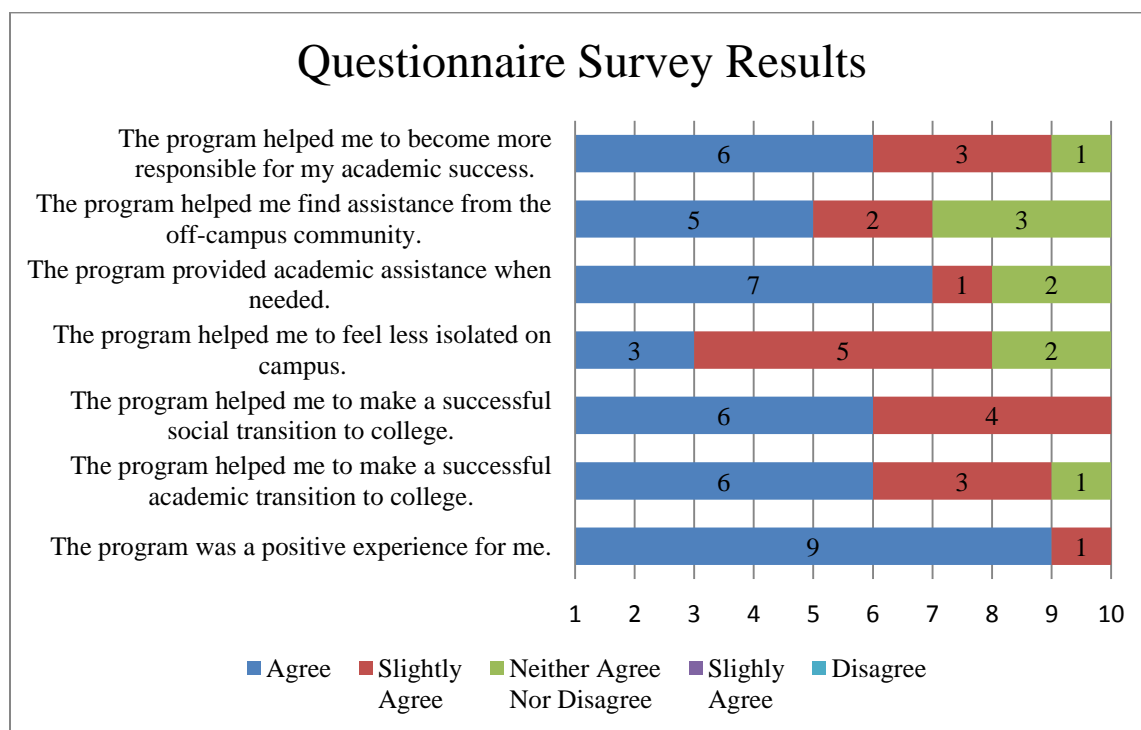
TABLE 6: Parents' highest level of education



The BJP participants' stories mirror those of others who have traversed similar campuses. These young men, like African American men at many campuses, have faced similar social, economic, and educational challenges throughout their lives. A few of the participants came from single parent homes and were raised by their mothers. Those who came from two-parent homes emphasized that the importance of hard work was instilled in them from an early age. All of the participants indicated that they were not willing to settle for anything less than chasing after their dreams. Coming to college ultimately became a major goal for these young men. Regardless of the path each had taken to BJP, they all possessed a strong resolve to succeed. Participant vignettes are included in Chapter Four.

As previously mentioned, a survey was included in the questionnaire. The survey questions were developed from the researcher's understanding of academic and social integration literature and were administered at the beginning of the focus group. The researcher focused the survey on questions that would enable him to understand how the participants viewed the Men Built with Character program. It was important to the researcher that the survey be concise, so it was limited to seven questions that could be answered in less than five minutes. All ten participants completed the survey, and the results can be found below.

TABLE 7: Questionnaire survey results



Design Process

In this section, the recruitment strategies, data collection, and data analysis process are described. Prior to submitting the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application, the researcher obtained permission from the Director of Multicultural Academic Services to conduct the study with the Men Built with Character program.

Recruitment Strategy

The researcher submitted an email (APPENDIX I) to the program coordinator informing him of the proposed study and requested his assistance. Included in the email was a thorough outline of the study, with all supporting documents. The program coordinator forwarded the researcher's packet to the Director of Multicultural Academic Services and requested a letter of support on the researcher's behalf. Upon receiving this letter of support, the researcher submitted an IRB protocol approval application to the Office of Institutional Research with all supporting documents. After receiving approval to conduct the study, the researcher worked closely with the program coordinator to outline a detailed schedule for when the data collection period would take place. The researcher provided the program coordinator with a recruitment flyer (APPENDIX L) to post on the listserv and asked for recommendations of persons to whom a special invitation could be sent. Students self-determined their eligibility. The researcher reviewed each individual who had responded to the recruitment effort in order to confirm qualification to participate in the study. Once the potential participants were identified, an email (APPENDIX J) was sent to each prospective participant with specific instructions outlining how the research process would proceed. A preliminary consent was obtained, and then a meeting with the student participants was scheduled.

The first two interviews were with the two non-student participants: the program founder and the program coordinator. At the time of the study, neither of the founders worked at BJP, which presented logistical challenges. However, an email (APPENDIX K) was sent to both of them requesting an opportunity to meet. After making several attempts to connect with both founders, the researcher was only able to interview one of the founders. The researcher used a semi-structured protocol (APPENDIX E) to interview the Program Founder to glean a historical overview of the creation of the program. The interview lasted approximately one hour and eight minutes. An email (APPENDIX H) was also sent to the Program Coordinator to request a time to meet. The Program Coordinator, who was responsible for the day-to-day leadership of the program, was interviewed using a semi-structured protocol (APPENDIX D) in his office to get a sense of the current state of the program. That interview lasted approximately fifty-eight minutes. Both the Program Coordinator and Program Founder signed their respective consent forms (APPENDIX G). Both interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Focus Group

After the interviews with the non-student participants, a focus group was conducted to gather information about the perceptions of the student participants' experiences of the institutional support service program. Krueger and Casey (2009) have suggested that there are three types of questions in a focus group: engagement questions, exploration questions, and exit questions. Each question built upon the previous response, with the intent of providing an accurate account of the phenomenon under investigation. Marshall and Rossman (2006) claim that "people often need to listen to others' opinions and understandings to form their own" (p.114). These researchers further

suggest that it is possible that certain inferences can be made as to the overall experiences of Black males from the data drawn from the experiences of the small group of black males who participate in a focus group (2006). In the present study, the focus group shed insight on the experiences of the participants in "Men Built with Character" at BJP. The focus group also provided fodder for the individual interviews.

When the focus group met, the participants were assembled into a semi-circle. After introductions to each other and to the project, the focus group discussion began. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C) was used to keep the focus group on task while still allowing for flexibility based on the responses received. The focus group took place during a normally scheduled "Men Built with Character" meeting in order avoid disrupting the participants' schedule. The researcher initially intended to recruit a group of five or six participants to take part in a one-and-a-half-hour focus group; however, ten participants showed up on the day of the focus group eager to participate in the study. Each participant was given the opportunity to respond to each question, but no one was required to respond to all questions. The participants as a whole provided rich descriptions of their experiences during the focus group. The focus group lasted for approximately one hour and was recorded with a digital camcorder.

Prior to starting the interviews, the consent document (APPENDIX F) was again reviewed with each participant. If a participant agreed to participate in the study, the primary investigator requested his signature on the document. All participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that there was no disadvantage if they chose not to participate. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used for all of the participants. The participants were given a copy of the informed

consent form, signed by the primary investigator. The signed consent form was stored under lock and key with the researcher. The focus group was recorded using a Sony Bloggie Touch HD digital camcorder.

Refreshments were provided to participants; however they were initially reluctant to eat the food. By the end of the focus group, they warmed up to the researcher and ate the food. Each participant completed a questionnaire, and from that information, a demographic profile was created for each participant. At the conclusion of the focus group, the researcher offered those Black males a chance to participate in the individual interview, as was indicated in the strategy for recruiting participants.

Thank-you emails were sent to everyone who participated in the study, both in the focus groups and those who volunteered to participate in the individual interviews. In the thank-you email, the researcher attached the flyer (which informed potential participants about the study) and asked those Black males willing to participate to spread the word to others. The researcher reached out to the Program Coordinator and informed him of his project. The researcher provided him with a specific message to send out to the entire program offering the Black males in the program who had not participated in the study another opportunity to have their stories told. However, no one was able to secure additional participants. Although a good faith effort was made to secure the initial target number of Black males for this study, and even though more males participated in the focus group than initially expected, fewer males participated in the individual interviews. However, from those who did participate, a wealth of knowledge was gained that is relevant to this study. All interviews with the student and non-student participants took place between December 2012 and March 2013.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted in an attempt to hone in on the participants' perceptions of the program. Individual interviews are the most widely used data collection strategy in qualitative research (Nunkoosin, 2005). Individual interviewing offered the researcher the opportunity to delve with the participants into detailed accounts of their inner lives and thoughts (Fielding, 1994). Recognizing that, to some degree, the interviewee might control to what extent he shares his innermost thoughts on any particular situation, individual interviews are intended to provide a comfortable environment that is conducive to the interviewee disclosing his opinions (Morse, 2000).

According to Seidman (2006), "Interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). He offers an interview model that the researcher used while conducting the individual interviews for this study. The model required the researcher to structure the interviews in a way that allowed the participant the chance to explore his past, describe his present situation, and ultimately reflect upon what he is now doing in his life. The proposed interview protocol was broken up into one three-part interview. During the first part of the interview, the researcher attempted to put the participant's experience in context by asking him to tell as much as possible about himself up until the time he became student at BJP and joined "Men Built with Character." The researcher strived to get the participants to naturally reconstruct their early experiences in their families, in school, with friends, and in their neighborhood in which they grew up.

The second part of the interview concentrated on the concrete details of the participant's present experience of being an African-American male at a PWI. The

researcher attempted to determine how the participants used the program to integrate into the institution both academically and socially. The third section of the interview challenged the participants to think about the meaning of their experiences up to that point and reflect upon their involvement in the program. With this portion of the interview, the researcher attempted to bridge the connection between the participants' involvement in the institutional support program and their own lives. Ultimately, the researcher challenged the participant to reflect on the factors in his life that led him to their current situation. Then the researcher looked at the participant's current situation in detail and helped him make meaning of it with hopes of getting the participant to intentionally reflect on his perceptions of the program.

Loftin, Barnett, Bunn, and Sullivan (2005) found that specific characteristics influence the successful recruitment, participation, and retention of African Americans in research studies. Those study characteristics include "culturally competent approaches; caring, trusting relationships; incentives; and follow-up" (p.252). Based on this, refreshments were provided at the focus group and a \$15 Wal-Mart gift certificate was given to students who participated in the individual interviews.

Seven students agreed to participate in the interview phase of the data collection process. Individual interviews were conducted on campus in a location that provided a high degree of privacy. The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (APPENDIX B) that allowed the researcher to use a list of questions that afforded the flexibility to ask probing questions as needed. The individual interview protocol was broken up into one interview with three parts. Each interview differed in length, with times ranging from 90 to 120 minutes. Each interview was recorded using a Sony ICD-AX412 IC Digital

recorder, and later transcribed verbatim. Audio/video files were kept on a password-protected laptop and were saved in a password-protected folder. Transcripts were kept on password-protected external hard drive.

Archival

According to Jick (1979), "[A]rchival data refers to information that already exists" (p. 605). Axinn, Barber, and Ghimire (1997) define archival data as including "paper or electronic documents stored on computer disks, CDs, DVDs, etc. – and may include photographs and audio and video recordings as well" (p.372). Going into the archival data collection process, the researcher assumed that important pieces of history pertaining to the establishment of the program existed that would paint a more vivid image of how the program reached its current position today. A question kept recurring to the researcher as he reviewed the archival data: "What stories could be learned that had been lost over time?" The possibility that the researcher could view documents that would highlight the state of the institution at the time the "Men Built with Character" program was created in 2007 was intriguing.

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher continued to explore the literature in order to gain better insight into why institutions of higher education across the country are pouring resources into initiatives designed to increase the retention and graduation of minority students, especially Black males. After completing all interviews, the researcher requested from the program coordinator on a numerous occasions permission to obtain copies of past end-of-year reports. The researcher intended to inform his own study with a solid historical account of the program, including examples of experiences created for and by the participants. Unfortunately, the coordinator of the

program did not provide the researcher with any of the material requested. After several attempts to obtain the information, the researcher went through other sources to collect documentation about the program: he reached out to the participants within the study and requested copies of old flyers of programs, minutes from previous meetings, agendas from past retreats, and programmatic guides from current and past years to better understand what the program had offered the students over time. The participants provided the researcher with what they had among their personal effects. The researcher then scoured through social media to obtain images and information about the program and the experiences it had created for participants. Ultimately, the researcher was able to secure the following items:

- Several copies of old flyers of programs (hosted by Men Built with Character or programs on which they collaborated with others)
- Oral histories (from former faculty and staff who had worked with the program)
- Minutes from eleven previous "rap session" meetings
- Agendas from three past retreats
- Programmatic guides dating back four years

By reviewing the archival data, the researcher was able to look back at the effects of the program over time in order to better understand how the program had evolved. In many instances, the archival data collection process gave the researcher opportunities to determine the program's effectiveness in terms of process, outcomes, or both. Reviewing oral histories, meeting minutes, old program flyers, and other documents gave the researcher insight into why a particular approach had or had not worked, or why some

participants stayed in the program while others left. The archival research also deepened the researcher's understanding of the program needs and concerns. The bulk of the data came from the individual interviews with the program founder, program coordinator, the participants, and the review of archival data. The participants had much to say and were eagerly excited to provide their insights on the topic at hand.

Data Analysis

Glesne (2006) notes that "data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (p.147). As Weber (1990) puts it,

Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings. (p.16).

In the present study, the researcher aimed to synthesize the data in order to establish a meaningful understanding of the subject at hand, while at the same time he strived to maintain the integrity of the participants' voices. He developed a summary of the responses from the interviews and focus group. As Yin (1994) asserts, "Analyzing case study evidence is especially difficult because the strategies and techniques have not been well defined in the past" (p. 102). One becomes more proficient in case study analysis over time by actually doing case study analyses, and the researcher found that to be true for this study.

Data analysis for this study followed Marshall and Rossman's (2006) guidelines, as outlined below.

1. Organizing the data: The researcher initially intended to use a computerized qualitative data analysis program to assist in organizing the data collected for the

study. *Atlas.ti* was selected over other options because of its solid reviews on its ability to analyze large sections of text, as well as visual and audio data. However, after spending several weeks attempting to learn how to use the software effectively and efficiently through attending workshops and taking one-on-one lessons, the computer assisted software proved to be more of an interference than a productive tool. The researcher's limited understanding of how to use the software hindered his ability to progress. Therefore, he decided to use a more traditional approach to conducting the content analysis. All data was printed and posted on large butcher block paper. As the researcher read through each item, copious notes were made. As themes emerged, sections of the text were cut and reorganized until the final themes crystallized.

2. Immersion in the data: The researcher desired to explore the plight of African American males within higher education. This required that the researcher become thoroughly immersed in the data to better understand where the participants were coming from when they shared their personal stories. By spending quality time with the data, reading the transcripts and supporting documents, the researcher became more familiar with the unique experiences that each participant had disclosed, a process that enables him to form answers to the guiding questions for this study. Listening to each participant's unique story gave the researcher a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of each participant. As Down-Wamboldt (1992) put it, "[T]he goal of content analysis is to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 314).

3. Generating categories and themes: The researcher transcribed the interviews he had conducted with the program founder and the program coordinator. After the focus group and individual interviews were completed, a professional transcriber transcribed the seven individual interviews and the one focus group interview. All of the transcriptions were completed within a week of the last interview. Upon receiving all of the transcriptions, the researcher began reviewing them thoroughly with hopes of capturing the specific details and/or impressions that came forth during the interviews (Patton, 2002). After reviewing all transcripts, the researcher organized all of the data for each participant's response per guiding research question to ensure ease of review. Each transcription was read repeatedly until noticeable patterns emerged. The researcher used open coding to categorize the data and find emerging themes. Glaser (1978) described open coding as a way to "generate an emergent set of categories and their properties" (p. 56). Strauss and Corbin (1990) extend this definition, describing open coding as "the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data" (p. 62). Throughout the coding process, the researcher constantly checked for patterns and themes that were present across all the interviews, seeking to discover the relationships among the themes while the interviews were still fresh in his mind. The researcher identified salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that linked participants and settings together.

An initial set of categories were developed based on the patterns that were identified, and they were used to guide the content analysis. While coding, the

researcher strived to remain open, to develop an intimate relationship with the data, to keep the codes straightforward, to recognize the potential bias he possessed, and to describe major findings based on the interactions with the individual participants.

4. Coding the data: Throughout each transcription, the researcher highlighted text and coded it using the initial set of categories. Text that could not be coded into one of these categories was coded with another level that captured its essence. After coding, the researcher examined the data for each category to determine whether subcategories were needed for a category. Data that could not be coded into one of the initial categories were reexamined to see whether they could be described in different dimensions. The ultimate goal of this process was to determine clear categories of descriptive themes. Relationships between categories and within categories and their properties were revealed.
5. Offering interpretations through analytic memos: During the process of analyzing the data, the researcher reflected on his notes by writing out his thoughts, insights, and conclusions in order that he might develop an interpretation of what he had learned.

Many researchers have written about the usefulness of qualitative research and the uses to which it can be put (Cohen & Saunders, 1996). As with any research proposal, in the words of Marshall and Rossman, "[T]he researcher should anticipate questions about the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.63). In particular, Stages Four and Five of Marshall and Rossman's analytic strategy help to ensure trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four techniques that the

researcher can use to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. The author of this study attended to each of these four techniques as follows:

1. **Credibility:** the researcher was able to demonstrate that the results of the inquiry accurately reflected the thoughts of the participants. The researcher supports the data through interviews and document collection. Additionally, member checks with participants took place, which involved referring data and interpretation back to the source for accurate corrections, verification, and challenge.
2. **Transferability:** the research findings can be transferred to other contexts or settings. Debriefing by non-involved professional peers occurred, which involved discussion of experiences, findings, and decisions.
3. **Dependability:** the researcher attempted to account for each changing condition within the study. As changes occurred in the research setting, the researcher described how these changes affected the way in which the study unfolded.

Conformability: the researcher strived to determine whether the findings of the study could be conformed or corroborated by others (p. 296). The researcher conducted data audits that examined the data collection and procedures in order to look for bias and/or distractions. The researcher employed a combination of techniques when collecting the data, rather than using a single technique: he administered a focus group, facilitated individual interviews with students and individual program leaders, and reviewed archival data. Utilizing multiple techniques aided the researcher in ensuring that the data was rich and that the findings were credible. The use of multiple techniques was an effort at what

Marshall and Rossman (2006) call "triangulation," that is, "the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point (p.84)." By using more than one source of data collection, the research design was strengthened.

4. Searching for alternative understandings: The researcher engaged in peer debriefing. This is a process whereby the researcher engages in extended discussions with disinterested peers who pose questions to help the researcher identify his/her own values and provide direction toward the next step of the study (Patton, 2002). The researcher reached out to three fellow doctoral candidate who are a part of his support group, one graduate student who is majoring in Higher Education Administration, and the Director of University Housing, as well as one Housekeeper and a Community Director at the current institution where he works. During each meeting, the researcher and his peers looked at the transcripts in depth. At the beginning of each conversation, the group never knew exactly which direction the discussion would take them; however, by the end of the meeting, heated discussions had occurred that challenged the researcher to think differently about the topic at hand. Each of the group members posed unique questions and commented on various aspects of the researcher's drafts. The peers also gave the researcher helpful feedback and suggestions for analyzing the data. They served as a sounding board as the data was coded. The researcher believes that their honest perspectives challenged him to broaden the lens through which he looked at the data and helped him to avoid overlooking any key elements. The researcher also conducted member checks with each participant of the study to ensure that he interpreted each of their statements accurately. Patton (2002) contends that

member checks are the most important criterion for establishing the credibility of the data. The researcher conducted these checks by summarizing the data with the participants at the time of the interview, after each interview was transcribed, and after the coding of each interview.

The researcher also maintained an audit trail to substantiate trustworthiness. According to Rodgers (2008), "an audit trail in qualitative research consists of a thorough collection of documentation regarding all aspects of the research process" (p.44). The researcher used an audit trail to keep track of his progress. He kept a journal that included notes about his data collection experiences, documentation of critical information regarding alterations with the overall data collection strategies, his positive and negative experiences while conducting the study, and notes from observations the researcher had while in the field. In particular, he highlighted a few encounters where he had to recognize that the work he was doing as a researcher was not going to be accepted or appreciated by all. Keeping an audit trail helped the researcher to stay organized and reflective throughout the journey.

5. Writing the report or other format for presenting the study: Yin (2012) notes that in any study, evidence "should be presented with sufficient clarity" (p. 14). Failures to explain the research study in a manner in which the audience can understand the implications of the findings can diminish the value or usefulness of the study results.

Throughout this research, every effort was made to maintain confidentiality. The researcher knows the identity of participants, and the audio/video digital file contains the

names of the participants. However, all identifiers were redacted during transcription, and all participants were de-identified by the assignment of a pseudonym. The pseudonyms were used in the transcripts and all write-ups of the data. A demographic questionnaire was administered only to obtain basic demographics. Neither the aggregated demographic sheet nor transcripts and corresponding recordings will be destroyed. The individual demographic questionnaires will be destroyed within one year of the completion of the study.

Interview audio/video files and transcripts were kept under lock and key in two separate locations. Audio/video files were kept on a password-protected laptop and were saved in a password-protected folder. Transcripts were kept on a password-protected external hard drive. The principal investigator was the only person with unrestricted access to the data. After the completion of the dissertation, the audio/video files will be kept for ten years. If anyone had requested follow-up, all correspondence would have been sent via e-mail or by phone; however, no follow-up was needed. The researcher did not code participant identifiers, so no master list was created as a crosswalk between code and participant identity. All interview participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcripts for review.

Ethical Considerations

This study had no foreseeable risk. However, there can be some uncomfortable feelings on the part of the interviewed participants because some interview questions might inspire recollection of previous negative experiences they have faced as African American male students at BJP. The researcher attempted to make the questions as open and tactful as possible. Additionally, the researcher provided participants with the phone

number to the counseling center in the event that any participant needed an opportunity to debrief his experience.

Benefits to Participants and Program Leaders

The study can assist BJP in better understanding African American males and can guide further research on the role of institutional support services for Black males. It can shed light on the participants' experiences with the program and as students at BJP. Both the student and the program leaders can benefit from the stories shared. Many times, a program is developed based on a specific need, and quantitative indicators are used to describe its success or failure. The stories and experiences of the actual participants are often not explored or factored in to determine the impact of their involvement in the initiative. The participants will benefit from the study by being able to share their stories in an attempt to help student affairs professionals better address the needs of African American males attending BJP. The program leaders can take away feedback they receive from the program participants to stay current on the climate at BJP. By staying current, program leaders can develop more relevant ways to shape the future direction of the program. New ideas and ways of doing things can come about, ultimately enhancing the program and its participants.

Summary

Chapter Three outlined in detail the methodology used to guide this study. This chapter gave an in-depth overview of the research design. In addition, it provided a full description of the site selection, participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the benefits to participants and program leaders.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This study explored black male students' perception of the role that institutional support services play in their retention and matriculation. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and academic and social integration theories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Tinto, 1993) were used as a foundation. Studies examining how African American males perceive programs intended to retain them until graduation are scarce; thus, the results from this study can enhance the work of practitioners, policy makers, and other constituents that work with such programs in the field. This chapter provides a description of the Men Built with Character program, participants' vignettes, and the themes that emerged from the data. Three research questions framed the development of themes in this study.

1. How do Men Built with Character participants perceive the program's impact on their collegiate experience?
2. How does the program facilitate academic and social integration for program participants?
3. What are the key dimensions of an Institutional Support Service program aimed at the retention of Black undergraduate males?

Program Overview

Archival data, which included several copies of old flyers and programs; oral histories; minutes from previous rap session meetings; agendas from past retreats; and programmatic guides from current and past years; as well as interviews with the participants, program founder, and director, were used to develop a rich description of the Men Built with Character program. From some of the documents listed above, it was revealed that professionals from offices such as the University Center for Academic Excellence, the Counseling Center, Financial Aid, and Academic Advising in addition to the Office of Volunteer and Outreach Services collaboratively work together to design unique experiences for the men. The program does not require attendance, but participants are highly encouraged to attend the rap session each month. There is no penalty if they do not participate in a certain number of programs; they will not remove or be dropped from the program.

The flexibility in the program allows the "brothers" to engage in the program in the degree to which they feel comfortable. (The term "brother" was used often by the participants within this study to refer to the other Black male students in Men Built with Character.) Mr. Danny McDonald, the Program Coordinator, pushes the men to attend at least three to four events per semester. Mr. McDonald indicated during the interview that he believes the more events they attend, and the more active they are, the more they get out of the program. The men classified as freshmen are required to come in the fall and the spring semester for advising. Once they become sophomores and higher, advising is given only as needed. If additional assistance is needed, members can make an appointment. The program has one hundred males on roster. Based on his 2.5 years in the

position, the program coordinator estimates that close to 200 men have come in contact with the program.

The program's leadership has embedded components in the program that they believe represent best practices. These practices were implemented to enhance the students' experience through direct contact with both administrators and faculty/staff.. Best practice included five components: one-on-one interactions with both administrators and faculty, academic advising, an annual retreat, an annual on-campus conference, and regular rap sessions. The one-on-one interactions occur between the Coordinator and students, who come together to talk about life or pressing issues impacting the student. These conversations typically occur at a location that is convenient for both parties.

Offering academic advising is the second best practice and is critical within the program. Prior to taking on this job, Mr. McDonald worked in academic advising at BJP, so he had knowledge of how to navigate the academic system. The third best practice is the facilitation of a retreat, which occurs yearly at Camp Kanuga nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina. There, Mr. McDonald, faculty/staff, and other volunteers engage with the students through workshops on financial literacy, academics, empowerment, and personal wellness. The fourth best practice is the annual male leadership conference on campus. Scholars from across the country come to this conference to discuss issues related to African American males in higher education. Students from other institutions also attend, and this experience affords all in attendance opportunities to connect. Finally, the bi-monthly rap sessions are the fifth best practice. At these meetings, the men discuss various topics, including study skills, test-taking, financial literacy, personal empowerment, career coaching, life skills, network and

relationship building, and becoming a better man. The program aims to support the men not only academically (because the ultimate goal is retention and to graduate them) but also personally, assisting them in becoming better men for their families, communities, professions once they leave the University.

Programs put on by Men Built with Character	
Men Making Men "Rap Sessions"	A bi monthly meeting held to address the issues and concerns of the Men Built with Character participants are contending with. This meeting serves as a refuge, where participants can come together and learn from each other, vent their frustration and learn how to problem solve productively, efficiently and effectively.
Phat Pockets (Financial Literacy Program)	Topics include understanding financial aid and making the best decisions when borrowing money to finance education, making sense of paychecks, opening bank accounts, saving money, importance of understanding the stock market and how it effects their lives and financial responsibilities. (*Program adapted from SUNY in New York States)
Academic Advisement	First year students are required to meet with Mr. McDonald to ensure they are taking classes pertinent to their degree. Second year students have the option to meet with Mr. McDonald.
Professional and Personal Etiquette	Through a series of workshops participants will learn the social skills needed to navigate the social/corporate environment, dining etiquette, and cultural etiquette.
Career Coaching	Supportive advice offered to help participants figure out their career path along with the necessary things they will need to do in order to thrive in that field.
Life-Skills Workshops	Intentional support given to help the participants clarify their life vision.
Networking and Relationship Building Events	Events designed to help participants connect with resources that will enhance their collegiate experience.

FIGURE 5: Programs put on by men built with character

In the researcher's interview with Mr. McDonald, the program coordinator reported that the success of the program is measured based on the participants' GPAs and on how well the men perform from semester to semester. However, given that no particular requirements exist for participating in the program, there is no baseline for describing student success, presenting some unique challenges. For example, for the period of meetings in which I had copies of the minutes, I discovered that the actual number on the roster for the program was different from the number of men who actually attended programs regularly. On roster, Mr. McDonald indicated that he had approximately one hundred students. However, of that amount, based on the meeting minutes, not all one hundred participants were actively and consistently involved. Using this example, one can conclude that Mr. McDonald would have a challenging time in developing comparable data points for measuring student success from year to year. Also, several meeting minutes reviewed highlighted the fact that alternative efforts were being explored to quantify what success actually meant in the context of impacting the student experience. With the variety of programs and opportunities offered to the participants, notes from the minutes suggested that the students and staff had different ideas of how success should be evaluated. Conversations happened at various levels with the underlying goal of determining a realistic approach to measuring success. However, in the meantime, Mr. McDonald mentioned that success is being unofficially measured by the number of men who participate in the various activities put on by the program. All in all, the program is designed to intentionally shape and support the overall Black male experience through the various opportunities it affords its members. Perhaps, success

needs to be measured not merely quantitatively, but also qualitatively. Rich data can emerge to support the future viability of the program.

Participants' Vignettes

The following section provides a summary of the unique characteristics of each participant of this study. According to Seidman (2006), constructing a profile or vignette of participants' experiences is an effective way of sharing interview data and opening up one's interview material to analysis and interpretation (p. 119).

Chuck

Chuck is the oldest of three siblings. He went to a predominantly Black high school. When he graduated from high school, he decided to enroll in a local community college initially because his parents told him he could not stay home and do nothing. He was not sure exactly what he wanted to pursue. While attending the community college, he realized that he did not want to stay there long, and he buckled down to obtain the grades he needed in order to transfer to BJP. Chuck's mother had some college education, and Chuck's father held a high school diploma but no college.

Jerry

Jerry is the eldest of two brothers. From a very young age, the importance of going to college was instilled in him by his parents and grandparents. He grew up playing many sports and assumed early on that he would use his athletic ability to get into college. He did not pay much attention to his grades and did only enough to be eligible to stay on the court and/or field. His parents had met in college; however, neither of them had finished due to becoming pregnant with him. Growing up, his parents constantly reminded him that they did not want him to follow their footsteps and begged him to

strive to do differently. When the time came for him to walk across the stage and receive his high school diploma, a shock of reality settled in when he realized that he did not have a plan to go to college. His initial plan of playing sports did not pan out. As the weeks passed after graduation, he reminisced about classes he had enjoyed throughout his high school experience, especially his graphic design class. He decided that he would go to college to study graphic design. He initially enrolled into a small Christian educational institution located in a small, historic town. He viewed going to this school as a punishment for not taking his academics seriously while in high school. He made the Dean's list both semesters during his first year and then transferred to BJP. Recently, his mother graduated from college; however his dad never did return.

Joshua

Joshua is one of four siblings. He grew up right outside of New Orleans in a small town called Jefferson, where most of his family worked in the rail yard. Most of the men in his family have been in and out of the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Although these men were repeat offenders, Joshua recalled many of them striving to keep him from Angola Prison, the place they called "the Alcatraz of the South." His parents were very involved in their church, and that established his religious foundation early on. At the age of seven, he remembered his mom teaching him Psalm 23:4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." Joshua shared with the researcher that he repeated that passage daily as he headed out to school or anywhere else he went.

With the many people he had encouraging him not to follow the example of his peers and family members, Joshua still played around in high school and did not put

much effort into anything. He possessed a quick temper and hated talking in front of anyone. He walked around and tried to blend in for most of his life. He became especially shy when he was diagnosed with a speech impediment. He had long known something was wrong with his speech, but his parents had never taken him to a specialist to be checked out. This in part was because his parents never had discretionary funds. Both of his parents had gotten into legal trouble the summer between his eighth and nine year because they had tried to bring in extra money for the family using illegal means, which resulted in both of them being charged and convicted of multiple felonies. When Joshua recalled these experiences in his interview, he reflected on many memories and identified his parents' legal troubles as a pivotal moment in his life, when he hit rock bottom. After his parents' conviction, the court system provided two options for him and his three siblings: either they would be split up and placed in the foster system, or they would have to leave the state they called home to live with their dad's side of the family in North Carolina. Of course, they left and moved in with his paternal aunt, where they lived until they all graduated from high school. Initially he struggled tremendously, feeling as if he was in a foreign country because nothing resembled Jefferson, Louisiana. The food was different, his peers talked differently, the houses looked different, and his teachers in high school actually acted as if they cared about him and their subjects. He gradually acclimated to his new environment. His teacher worked with his Aunt to get him connected with a speech pathologist, and over time, his speech improved drastically.

Chancellor

My first interaction with Chancellor was memorable yet awkward. He came off extremely quiet, and the first thing he shared with me when I said hello was, "I'm in a bi-

racial relationship. Will that impact my ability to participate in the focus group?" After collecting my composure, I welcomed him to join in on the conversation and reassured him that his choice to be in a bi-racial relationship would not affect his opportunity to participate. He briefly paused and then he reached out and made the gesture like he wanted to embrace, much like many black men do when they come in contact. True to fashion, I opened my arms without a hesitation and he gave me a big squeeze and said thank you.

I later learned that Chancellor grew up as an only child. His parents were extremely protective and attempted to guard him from any negative experiences. They were very particular on the type of school he attended, from elementary school to high school. His parents had him in predominantly white schools. They did not have a strong relationship with their extended family; he knew that he had numerous cousins but never met any of them. His parents' lack of exposure caused them to raise Chancellor in a very sheltered environment. From one perspective, he excelled in school, and he was offered many opportunities ranging from traveling, to obtaining internships, to studying abroad multiple times while in high school. On the other hand, he never interacted with anyone who looked like him until he got to college. He never listened to what he considered "urban" music because it was not allowed in his parents' house. It was not until he arrived on the BJP campus that he heard music by persons of color. He recalled going home during fall break of his first semester in school and asking his parents why they never exposed him to multiple genres of music. He mentioned to his parents that more music existed beyond "gang banging music" and asked them had they heard of Miles Davis, Nat King Cole, or John Coltrane. They appeared to feel threatened, and they shut down the

conversation. He went back to school confused but eager to learn. Chancellor acknowledges joining Men Built with Character because it provides a safe environment in which he can become comfortable with himself and his people.

Traven

Traven is the younger sibling of two. He is extremely close to his older sister and admires her immensely. Growing up, the two of them became close because of their unique passion for shoe collection. He recalls the both of them saving their money to buy each other a pair of Jordans the first day they came out. However, his all-time favorite pairs that he collected are the Nike Air Force 180 High Retro [No Pump] tennis shoes and the Nike Air Griffey Max II (Grey Pair). He realized early in his childhood that he was exceptionally smart but saw how his peers were treated when everyone found out they had done well on a test. Therefore, he intentionally failed so that he could fit in with his classmates. His thought process was simple: "No need to have a fresh pair of tennis shoes on and someone try you in the public...it is not worth messing up my shoes." As crazy as it may sound, he abided by that philosophy throughout his early life. He always wore the nice clothes and knew how to switch his language up depending upon whom he was around. Growing up, he did not recall his teachers placing much emphasis on the idea of him being a success. Therefore, when he got to high school, his trajectory toward a vocation, rather than toward college, was already set.

Traven grew up in a single parent home with his mother. Early on, his father was in and out of his life. Neither one of his parents went to college. Therefore, when they found out that he was on the vocational track, they were unconcerned. They simply assumed that he would go to college and do something with his hands. However, based

on the track he was in, the courses he would take would not prepare him to get into a solid institution of higher education. Once that was discovered, his parents "raised hell" at his school, insisting that they put him in the college prep track. After numerous battles with his teachers, the school counselor, and the principal, Traven's parents were able to have him converted to the college prep track. He knew from the struggle his parents went through to get him on the right track that he did not have any room to mess up. At that point, he became comfortable excelling in the classroom. His efforts in high school prepared him to get admitted to BJP straight out of high school.

Chris

Chris is the younger of two. When asked to tell me about himself, he eagerly shared that he was appreciative to have this opportunity to participate in this study. He was extremely open and honest about his childhood. He grew up in a single-parent home with his mother. His father was occasionally involved; his parents had simply never gotten married before they had had him. He said that it was important for me to know that he was not subject to the pressures of growing up without a father figure in the home. His dad challenged him to be his own person and never mimic what his peers did.

That was extremely helpful for him because, growing up, he lacked confidence. His sister encouraged him to become confident in himself despite what his peers said or did to him. Over the course of the summer between his freshmen and sophomore years in high school, he started growing dreadlocks. He believed that he found strength in his hair; in his interview, he referenced the story of Samson and Delilah (Judges 13:5), as told to him by his sister. She told him that God had created him in God's own image, and she challenged Chris to become comfortable with himself. In his interview, Chris noted that she told him the story of Samson and Delilah not to emphasize how Samson was defeated

but rather to highlight the strength he found in his hair. Now, four years later, the same individuals who used to pick on him reached out to him requesting help with starting the process of dreading their hair. Chris also highlighted in his interview the fact that from the confidence he has gained, he has changed the entire way he thinks, dresses, and acts. His biggest role model is NBA star Dwayne Wade, and he strives to emulate everything Wade does. Chris was able to enroll in BJP directly out of high school. BJP has been a major culture shock because he is not used to being around so many White people, but he is adjusting.

Makinley

Makinley is the youngest of a three siblings. He came to BJP despite being accepted into Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Duke, Dartmouth, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a few other top-tier schools. He grew up in an impoverished area and watched his mother struggle to make ends meet. His brothers were in and out of prison throughout his entire life, and his father was absent. In Makinley's interview, he recalled how excited he got in the morning to go to school in order to get a hot meal for breakfast and lunch each day. He realized that this excitement was not a normal experience for a little boy; however, his desire to excel in school originated in this experience. Receiving a hot meal was the one comfort that he knew would not change as long as he went to school. What made Makinley's situation worse is that as a child, he did not talk until the age of six. He was born with cerebral palsy, which affected his mother tremendously. She worked two to three jobs regularly to ensure that Makinley could get the required treatment from the doctor to address his health condition. He defied all the odds and did everything he set out to do.

Makinley's mother was extremely involved in the church and challenged him to live by Habakkuk 2:2, which simply stated, "[W]rite the vision and make it plain." Coming to college was not a major adjustment as it relates to his academic endeavors. He was extremely focused at first but found himself quickly bored in his classes. He picked up additional majors to stay challenged. When he found that was not working, he got involved in campus organizations, and since then, he has not been able to sit down. He is motivated and energized each day by being extremely involved in every possible thing he can get his hands on. The intrinsic motivation to succeed instilled in him by his mother keeps him eager to never quit.

Woody

Woody is from the Caribbean islands. From our initial interaction, his island persona was striking. Surprisingly, it felt as if we had known each other all of our lives. He is an only child and emphatically shared that he got excited when he learned about the opportunity to participate in the study. From the time he was born, he knew that going to college was the direction he wanted to take his life. He saw the results of what hard work could do, specifically giving a person the flexibility to be in control of his or her own life. He saw how his parents were able to travel a lot and do just about everything they wanted to do. He attributed that to the fact that they were college educated. He grew up in an affluent town that overlooked beaches that were pristine year-round, and he enjoyed playing golf and tennis in his spare time. As a child, when his family travelled, he was always surprised by how differently his family was treated than other guests in some of the luxurious vacation spots they frequented. It angered him that his family was consistently treated with less respect than lighter skinned travelers; however, he managed

his frustration and used it as fuel to push him to excel in the classroom. Throughout elementary school and in to high school, Woody was presented with a variety of opportunities that help shape why he selected to pursue a degree in Systems Engineering. He works extremely hard to stay focused because he acknowledged that it is a true privilege that he is able to pursue his education.

Harry

First impressions of Harry led me to think he was extremely focused and a no-nonsense type of person. However, after my initial interaction, I learned quickly that he was down-to-earth and full of energy. Not to suggest that one cannot be both, but, stark differences exist between the initial interaction and his demeanor as the conversation progressed. He simply needed a little time to open up. Slightly under the weather when we met, he noted that he was not willing to miss this opportunity to share his story. Somewhat caught off guard by his demeanor, I inquired about his desire to be in this study.

He offered a very in-depth image of where he grew up. He grew up in the ghetto, a place where dreams disappeared as quickly as the smoke that dissipated in the air from a lit joint burning on the ground. Dilapidated buildings, drugs, prostitution, crime, police sirens, graffiti, littering, and EBT cards getting declined in the middle of the month were the trappings of the place he called home. He watched his father beat on his mother many nights, and it became so bad that he and his sister left and went to stay with their grandmother.

During the summer of his eighth grade year, Harry's grandmother introduced him to the local high school's head basketball coach one Sunday after church. The two of

them became inseparable for the next four years. All along, though, Harry battled with trust issues. He noted that, even though he never mentioned his mother, his coach would always remind him that everyone looks life in the face and has to bounce back from the decisions they make. At the time, those conversations did not subdue the hurt and pain; however, it comforted enough to help him make it through another day.

Harry's mother went in and out of his life, and he recalled feeling angry every time she came around after he started living with his grandmother. His father never came around, and to this day, he does not know where his father is or whether he is still alive. In hindsight, Harry acknowledged that he believed that his mother did love him. However, she lacked the confidence to stand up for herself. The emotional strain took a toll on Harry and sapped his desire to finish school. Many times, he contemplated dropping out and running away from his situation. However, his coach and grandmother continued to encourage him to never give up. After practice, the coach took him home many nights to ensure he was able to get his homework done. That support gave him the confidence to refocus in his academic endeavors, and he finished the later part of his high school journey on a positive track and was able to get sufficient funding to attend BJP. Early in his time at BJP, he saw a group of Black men involved in Men Built with Character standing in front of the Student Union and encouraging Black males to be connected on campus. They told Harry that, if he got involved, he would be given a mentor to confide in, and that simple promise sold him on the deal.

James Frankie

James Frankie was eager to get involved when he went off to college. He possessed a gregarious personality, and in the short time the researcher spent with him, he

opened up and poured out his heart. He acknowledged that he grew up in a supportive family environment. Both of his parents and his siblings supported each other on everything. He has a fraternal twin and one older sister. He jokingly stated that the three of them did everything together growing up. Going off to college was their first time doing anything on their own. What was particularly astonishing was that both of the sisters continued the family tradition by going to the parents' alma mater. Academics always came naturally to the siblings, which allowed them to excel at other things. James Frankie considered himself to be quiet and reserved, but the go-to person amongst his siblings to convince his parents to allow them to do various things. He enjoys debating politics, issues centered on race, reading, and any activity that allows him to be on and in the water. For fun, he likes the outdoors and competitive swimming.

As a competitive swimmer, he encountered racism for the first time. At most meets, his family members were the only Black individuals in attendance. Initially, he witnessed White families awkwardly staring at him each day as he entered the pool for practice. He said, "If eyes could kill, I would be dead." He recalled random individuals breaking into his locker while he was in practice and damaging his items. Typically, the vandals would cut out his pants pockets and put his clothes neatly back as they found them. After two weeks of the same experience, he recalled sticking mouse traps in his clothes and hiding behind the shower wall to witness the individual breaking into his locker get his knuckles cracked by the mouse trap. After showing his peers that he was not going to quit swimming, they slowly warmed up to him. However, it was a slow process. The moment he walked out of the locker room, he recalled parents herding the children out the pool as if they were cattle being summoned to avoid being infected by a

disease. His anger grew, but his parents would not allow him to quit. They pushed him harder in practice not only to win but also to learn life lessons about problems that he would have to deal with in the future. After his first taste of victory when he caught a few individuals breaking into his locker, he felt vindicated. All in all, those experiences in the swimming pool did not tarnish his impression of White people. He simply used it as fuel to motivate himself; whether in the classroom or in the pool, he felt as if he had to challenge himself to do his best and never slack off. He grew to believe that White people did not expect much of him, and he was out to prove them wrong.

In high school, he noted that he always felt as if his teachers did not care about his progress. Once they realized that he was not struggling, they diverted most of their attention to the under-achieving students. He realized that if he knew the answer, he would not be called on. Eventually he developed a strong dislike towards school. He could not grasp why he had to spend so much time there if his teachers never included him in anything. His parents found out, and they were able to put him in accelerated classes. After this transition, he gradually began to like school again. One day, a family friend's son told him about a few events that he had attended as a member of Men Built with Character at BJP. James Frankie was so intrigued by his friend's experience that he decided to apply only to BJP, simply because of that program.

Findings

The participant data, coupled with the data from the non-student participants and the archival data, underwent a continual process of data analysis. Three themes emerged from each research question. These themes are illustrated below.

Perception of Impact	Academic & Social Integration	Key Dimensions
Father Figure	Awareness	Mentorship
Agent for Change	Resiliency	Inspiration
Sense of Community	Growth	Academic Enrichment

FIGURE 6: Emerging themes

Perceptions of Impact

The perceptions that participants in Men Built with Character have of the program's impact on their collegiate experience boiled down to three essential themes: father figure, agent for change, and sense of community. Each theme will be discussed below.

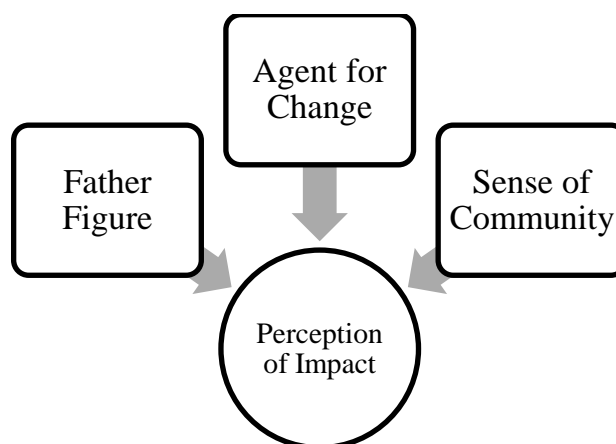


FIGURE 7: Perception of impact

Father Figure

If words were analogous to different paint colors, then "protector," "encourager," "nurturer," "kind," "patient," "wisdom," "genuine," "influential," and "advice-giver" would be among the words on the artist's palette that is used to depict the image of the father-like figure that so many young men described meeting within the program. While all of the participants did not come from a two-parent household, the father figure was

defined as more than a mentor, peer advisor, or parental figure. He was a trusted older male toward whom the participants could gravitate. This idea was extremely influential on participants' overall perception of the program. The data revealed two constructs associated with the father figure: "male perspective" and "guidance and support."

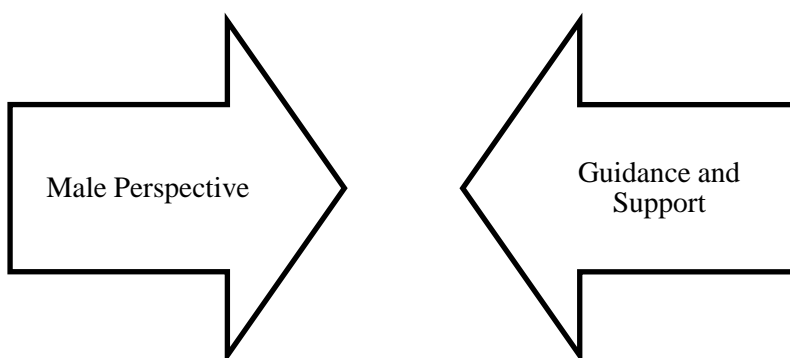


FIGURE 8: Father figure constructs

Male Perspective

Access to a male perspective was central to the perceptions of the young men in the study. The researcher observed in a variety of settings the literal role of a father being portrayed even when the individual playing the father role was not old enough to be the actual father. Some of the participants even alluded to the fact that they were dealing with issues in which they believed only a male's perspective could offer them peace of mind. During the focus group, Chancellor recalled that,

Having a male that they can go to and that they can talk to them about issues that they don't want to talk to a woman about, they don't want to talk to their girlfriends about, they want to talk to a man about, to get a male's perspective is key. A man can say...Sit down young buck...let me tell you...cause you looking at this all wrong. {Laugh} You know, you looking at this from a five-minute perspective. Let me give you the five-year perspective.

Although the young men came into the program with a variety of experiences, time after time, they jumped all over the opportunity to be supported by Mr. McDonald

and the other campus partners. Chancellor explained, "[M]any of the black males I know that have come to school did not have a father figure growing up, or any brothers in their home, and they lacked a strong male in their life." Mr. McDonald is intentional in his outreach to the young men. He created an environment conducive for the participants to develop a strong work ethic that would enable them to succeed. During the focus group, Traven added that,

I know Mr. McDonald, and he kind of runs Men Built with Character, so he's always been like that. ... I want to say kind of like a father figure to me. He's very serious, he let me know about opportunities, and he always tried to get me involved. Any time I need to go to his office, I can go to his office about anything, any time so I think he's just a positive guy I can go to.

Some participants referenced the fact that they had specific reasons for wanting to join the program (i.e. lack of support, loneliness, wanting to be involved). When times appeared rough, the participants knew where to run in order to get the necessary recharge to go back out and face life all over again. From the lens of the participants, Mr. McDonald along with others acts as a sounding board providing guidance and support. For example, in the individual interview with Makinley, he noted that "[H]aving other mentors like Danny McDonald and people like that who are there to catch me if I'm slipping, that's really good."

Makinley's perspective is interesting in that it highlights the fact that for him the program kept him on the right path. It provided the guidance and structure to help him refocus during those times when he got off track. Surprisingly, against popular belief, almost all of the males at some point in the discussion referenced the fact that they valued the accountability that came with working with Mr. McDonald and the other men within the program. They knew that the tough love Mr. McDonald displayed, like that received

from a father, came from a place of care. While skeptical at first, they eventually bought into what Mr. McDonald offered within the program and allowed those personal interactions to shape their overall experience at BJP.

On the other hand, Chuck offered a slightly different perspective on Mr. McDonald's father figure role. He mentioned that,

Mr. McDonald always pushes us to think about the world in which we live in. It's becoming more global, are we prepared? I haven't interacted with many white people before coming to BJP. They slightly intimidated me. I don't know why, but they did. Maybe I thought they were smarter than me or could do the work quicker when I was a child. Mrs. Breeden (my sixth grade Language Arts teacher) always picked the white kids to do everything before she picked the black kids. I'm not trying to play the race card, but Mrs. Breeden must have been uncomfortable with the black kids because she never showed us the same love everyone else got. When birthdays came for the little white girl in the class, I remember vividly watching her open the birthday card she got from Mrs. Breeden. When my birthday came, you think I got a card. Fuck no! That bitch gave me my fucking test back with a red upside down face with a message to do better next time. I sat there angry as hell and wondered what it mattered to her if I did better the next time? I knew she didn't care. Now that I'm here and see even more white people, I've had to have many conversations with Mr. McDonald and other brothers in the program. I know I need to be culturally sensitive and aware; however, are they being challenged the same way. Do they wonder at times when they go out to the real world if they will be judged based on the color of their skin? I feel like a got a double negative written across my forehead. Hey world, I'm black and a male. Please do not expect much of me. Mr. C., I know that's tough but them white folks don't have to think about what they say or do in the grand scheme of things.

Ironically though, the role of a father figure still came forth in shaping his experience. While supporting the students, the program seeks to challenge their way of thinking.

The participants agreed that Men Built with Character helped link them to resources and created opportunities for each of them. The program set out to provide an avenue for Black males to feel connected and supported at the institution. The program serves as that bridge for participants to become exposed to other resources and

experiences. Through the various activities and events observed, Mr. McDonald intentionally pushed the guys outside their comfort zones to connect with other campus partners to get a variety of perspectives on everything ranging from future school decisions, to jobs, to figuring out a financial plan for their future. As a father figure to many of the young men within the program, the amount of support provided by the leadership made a dramatic difference in their lives. In his individual interview, James Frankie asserted that, "[I]t doesn't even matter if the male is black, white, green, or pink. As long as he shows that he cares, that is all that matters for most males." Men from multiple offices across campus volunteered their time to help out when needed. The images displayed on marketing materials and on a variety of documents reviewed revealed that all of the volunteers did not look the same. While the vast majority were African American, many were not. This sheer fact dispelled the notion that only people who looked like the guys in the program could provide the necessary support and assistance. The father figures from a variety of races and ethnicities bolstered the self-confidence of the participants within the program.

Agent for Change

Various experiences within the program empower the participants to want to impact others, change themselves, and enhance the program. Within this theme, three subthemes came forth: "pay it forward," "confidence/standard of excellence," and "program empowerment."



FIGURE 9: Agent for change

As is evident from the mission statement, the goal of the program is to help black males successfully matriculate through their collegiate careers at BJP. The researcher noticed that an indirect outcome of the program is that the young men developed a sense of wanting to shape their experience in a way that set the stage for the next black males who enrolled in BJP. If that meant excelling in the classroom, role modeling positive behaviors, or challenging the traditional way of completing a process, the men within this study expressed a feeling of being obligated to do so. The program plants a seed and establishes a foundation for the students naturally to want to give back. Through hard work and determination, they prided themselves in being living examples for the next class to follow after.

James Frankie quoted the old line, "To whom much is given, much is expected." That statement resonated with the researcher and many of the participants. Many of them acknowledged that a number of their peers back home did not go to college. The fact that these young men were enrolled in BJP sparked a desired motivation to succeed. Although many of them expressed struggling in some ways, there was an overwhelming sense that

they had imposed upon themselves a responsibility to do their best and ultimately graduate. Some of them felt as if the pressure from back home to succeed was both good and bad. On one hand, the pressure pushed them to do their best. On the other hand, the pressure not to fail because they would let so many people back home down was a burden. It appeared to be a double-edged sword. However, the added pressure was just enough to push the participants in the right direction. In life, one tends to recall those special individuals who spoke into one's life and inspired one to go forth and prosper. On a number of occasions, many of the participants referenced this obligated feeling of wanting to pay it forward simply because so many people contributed to their lives. Going to college was not a taken for granted reality for all of the participants as it is by most people from a certain strata of society (i.e., white, middle to upper class, educated families). Due to certain circumstances, the hope of going to college was bleak to some of the participants. Therefore, taking part in the program offered a different image of how life could unfold. It provided exposure to new experiences and opportunities. Joshua asserted, "I feel obligated to give back because someone gave back to me. I felt like the way they helped me, like I didn't know that college was really for me initially." This thought, along with many others, serve as an example of how the young men responded to being a part of the program.

The participants' experiences within the program motivated them in a variety of ways. For example, during the focus group, Jerry was adamant that the program enticed him to want to bring other brothers into the fold and help them in the same way that the program had helped him. He went on to share,

Moving on to sophomore year, freshman ... I mean sophomore year/junior year, it made me want to recruit, it made me want to go out and help other brothers as

well. I remember in November of last year, last fall, Danny sent out the email, "We're going to be in front of the Union. Can you help us recruit?" I didn't even have to think about it. I subconsciously just said yes because that's how I was recruited. It was right in front of the Union. And so I think it was like 30 degrees at the end of November and I was still out there giving out fliers trying to hunt down people just to be as ... I see how important it is now and see how important it plays in African Americans' men's college experience.

Throughout the focus group, many of the participants remarked that through their involvement in the program they developed a willingness to do more than what was required of them. The sheer support offered to all of the young men empowered them to take ownership of their experiences at BJP and push others to get connected and involved. Traven is a perfect example of this. He has a huge heart and strives to pull other brothers up with him. He mentioned that,

I'm a big believer in helping other brothers out so it's nothing for me to go up to them and be like, "Yo, are you involved with anything? You should get involved with Men Built with Character. Do you care about being around other likeminded guys? Come get involved in it." Like I'm gonna have two brothers on Monday come in and I'm gonna call them and they're going to meet Mr. McDonald. I'm going to try to get them involved with Men Built with Character because they're not really involved in anything and I think it's very important for them to get involved. I mean, they're young black men and they're trying to be successful, as I am. I see it so I also want to help them. If you're serious, I'll take you serious. But if you're not, I don't want to waste my time.

From the focus group, it became extremely evident that the program empowers the men by boosting their confidence level and creating a more positive self-concept. Recognizing the importance of a positive self-concept, the males are able to accept the various challenges imposed on them and are more willing to try new things. Whether they fail or succeed, the men believe in themselves and believe that anything is possible. This, in turn, facilitates the men having a lot of pride in the program. Through intentional interactions with each other, participants noted that a strong sense of pride developed amongst each of them. James Frankie's experiences have been limited due to the length of

time that he has been in the program and a student at BJP; however, he shared that, "I can tell I've been affected a little bit. I'm walking a little more confident and I push myself."

In addition, the participants are encouraged to do their best. They are becoming more invested in their futures and striving to make better grades as a result of taking part in this program. They are so empowered and encouraged to be excellent that they create friendly competition on who can do the best because they realize that they are a positive representation of the program. Jerry contends that:

Men Built with Character has been beneficial for me simply because it's a reason to try to do good. It's just the simple fact you want to do good, you want to make a mark. You want to be...it's a competition in a way. Like we were talking about in the meeting yesterday and they hit it right on the head when you asked that question 'cause it's like a competition. You have somebody just who tries to compete against...not like really compete-compete, but just to, you know, just to try to maintain a good standard. You have a standard to uphold.

Through my interactions with the participants, I quickly learned that an unwritten rule of excellence existed among the guys. The older guys in the program have established a standard of excellence to which they hold the younger guys. Through this standard of excellence imposed by the guys, there is encouragement to do well. Chuck noted,

I feel like I am representing something. ... [I]f I fail, I am letting my brothers in Men Built with Character down. So for me it was kind of just like not letting them down, making the program look good is what I strive to do.

Joshua also offered that,

The program itself challenged me with the individuals in Men Built with Character because with the brothers here a lot of them are striving to succeed in the classroom; I rather challenge myself academically through what I see within them so I can be an example for others.

Jerry agreed:

Exactly like, he said. I feel the exact same way. It makes you work for something. If you have something behind you that you have to really prove to other people that this works and that I'm here representing Men Built with Character, not just

myself, not my parents, but I'm representing and organization on campus. And in order to show that it's a success and to get other people into it, you really have to be that stepping stone and be that shining light for other people.

Through some of the archival material, it was easy to see that the program empowered the participants to do well and provided a platform for competition. Meeting minutes revealed that the participants expressed a need to uphold a standard and wanting to live up to others' expectations drove them to do their best. They believed that they could influence change particularly as it relates to changing the structure and outcomes of the program. Jerry was adamant about the standard that the program provides and explained how he has been empowered and invigorated to make Mr. McDonald proud of him by doing his best and finding ways to be even better. Jerry noted,

Every day, just ... I always walk around campus, I go into my classrooms, and it's just the challenge of being maybe two blacks in a class of 100 people. That's just a challenge in itself because it's like how many minorities are there in the world and I'm in this classroom. And then you think about all the people that you have back home and your family who aren't in school, who aren't doing that and you think about that. Like I have to do good. I have to make this work. So that's really my challenge – just trying to do well. Just the pressure of just knowing I have to do well. It's not trying; it's I have to; I will do well; I'm going to do well. ... I have that standard. I have that standard I'm trying to live up to. I want to make Mr. McDonald proud. I don't want to be in his office every day talking to him and bringing him crappy grades. Or with my brother right here and he's doing better than me 'cause I'm really competitive. Really competitive. And I don't like anybody to do better than me. So that's really what it is, because like I said, I'm not really that outgoing so I never talked to anyone except select few. So now that I have more people to really know how I have to compete against, that means I have to come a whole lot harder.

In a more direct way, the program has served as an improvement tool by helping the participants to recognize that the program can be so much more than what it currently is. The participants in turn facilitate those difficult conversations about what needs to be done to improve the program. From the individual interviews, each of the seven participants voiced wanting to do more. The influence of the program has made them so

driven and enthusiastic to identify pitfalls of the programs and figure out ways to overcome them. It is almost revolutionary. A perfect example of how this plays out can be seen below. In the individual interview with Harry, he began to think critically about how the program can succeed and achieve more.

I mean, yea we have the rap sessions monthly, the retreat, and the various programs here and there, but I think the program could be doing more. I got a home boy that goes to North Carolina Central University. He's a part of this program called Centennial Scholars. Brothers, they got swag out this building. They constantly are doing something and from what he tells me, even their Vice Chancellor is at all their events. It seems as if the things the Centennial Scholars do are more structured. Like you know every month, certain things take place. I even saw it with my own two eyes. ... I went there on a Wednesday and they had this thing call Chicken Wednesday. It was so funny; everyone in the world was at the dining hall. All the Centennial Scholars came in looking sharp in their ties, dress shirts and slacks. They sat together and talked about some University sponsored trip they took to Miami the previous summer to explore Cuban American culture. I was in shock to see them engaged in this type of dialogue. Mr. C., we have the ability to allow our voice to serve as a platform to get extra help for future Black males coming to BJP. I think there have been a number of discussions about converting Men Built with Character into a student organization. Something like that? Yeah, so we can get out, reach more black males, and get more assistance from the university. 'Cause yes, we have a pretty cool group right here but imagine how, you know, how much more of an impact we could have if we had a wider base, a broader base. Not to say we need to imitate the Centennial Scholars program but I think we can have a more dramatic impact at BJP.

Throughout the focus group and individual interviews, participants introduced the idea that in order for the program to do better and reach more young men, the initiative has to be taken by the brothers. They must be that force for change. Moreover, when most of the participants started to talk about academic performance, a sense of frustration came over all of them. Ironically, the participants fully understood the importance of doing well in the classroom. However, several of the participants highlighted the fact that they believed that funding for the program was possibly tied to their academic performance. Therefore, the onus was on them to keep the program in place for future

brothers to experience. That stated, while listening to each of them express themselves, it was apparent that they were concerned about the overall institutional backing of the program. In their eyes, due to lack of adequate funding and resources, Mr. McDonald is put in a position where he is doing all of the work by himself. In his individual interview, Joshua asked a poignant question: "If the goal of the program is to figure out how to retain Black males at BJP, how can one person be tasked with this responsibility?" He went on to note that in one of his classes, the professor challenged the class to "work smart, not hard." He then made a rhetorical statement: "Does the university expect one person to reach all of us?" Chris made the following comments about how he attempted to address the issue in one of his classes:

I should have brought this up during the focus group but it slipped my mind with all of the other conversations going on. At any rate, in one of my business classes, the professor challenged each group in the class to address a real world issue for their final project. He encouraged us to step outside the box and tackle issues that were relevant to us. I had just come from a Men Built with Character rap session and we talked at great length about the low numbers of African American males attending BJP as opposed to white males. I took that conversation, got my group members on board, and developed it into our class project. Using the proverbial phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child," we suggested, "It takes an entire university to make a difference in the life of one Black male." Our premise was simple, if we combine efforts and work together versus working in silos; it could be possible that our efforts could have a greater impact on addressing the low retention rates of Black males. We argued that no longer can multiple departments work on this issue independently of each other. We considered the fact that resources are limited based on the current state of the economy and as a University; we wanted to be good stewards of our finances. That stated, our plan combined forces and coupled logical departments together to work on this issue. We paired the Director of Admissions with Mr. McDonald to jump on this issue immediately. The Director updated Mr. McDonald with the names of incoming Black males admitted into the institution each semester. Intentional outreach went to these students. We connected with the Orientation Office and developed an intentional message to be displayed during every Student Orientation over the summer and the few that occurred throughout the year. We sent marketing material to prospective students and parents. We visited the surrounding high schools in our area, because we knew we could catch a high percentage of Black males there and plant a seed. All of this was in part an institutional shift in focus.

Taking what the professor taught throughout that particular class, we wanted everyone to see that as an institution, we were putting funding where our priorities were in order to combat the low rates of enrollment and once they got here, putting strategies together to ensure retention.

Chris' comments highlight the fact that the participants are hopeful. They believe they can be the agents of change to address some of the issues impacting the program and Black males at the institution. They are becoming more empowered to use their voices to advocate for change. In addition, the males have become empowered to explore a variety of ways to seek funding to support the work of the program. Aware of the financial status of the program, the students are beginning to identify ways in which the university allocates funding. As a result, the findings from their exploration have led them to assume that the program is not being looked at for what it does. Through the participants' lens, the program helps them matriculate through their college experience. They want more out of the experience and recognize the struggles of the program. They are asking very poignant questions, such as, What is going on politically at the institution which limits the resources available for the program? Where is the help for the director? Why are there so few staff for the program? Where is the funding for the program?

Taking matters into their own hands, as they have been told repeatedly to do, the participants recognized that they could solicit additional funding if they became a student organization. During the individual interview, Makinley promoted the idea of Men Built with Character becoming a student organization; however, he understands the challenges that presents:

We're definitely trying to get out and let people know so we can expand and reach a lot more people and touch a lot more people's lives.....Well, I would say both, funding is definitely a big challenge because Mr. McDonald has such a limited budget right now with Men Built with Character. We might be able to put on events but we can't do like what some of the other organizations are doing like

throwing these parties and stuff like that but yeah and we also want to inform more folks about us so definitely being a student org being recognized by BJP would definitely help us reach more people. We probably should consider researching schools that have programs like ours to see what they are doing and see if any of it could fit here. Moreover, this could be huge for the ladies. A few of the shorties I know always harping about there's such a limited number of Black males being about the business. We could set the record straight and be there for the sisters so they don't have to venture off outside their race. Not to say love they can't be loved by someone outside their race, I just think it is possible they came off to school without a father figure in their lives and we could be that first example. Ya feel me?

Recognizing the importance of finding new ways to get funding for the program has become a puzzle for everyone. The men have taken ownership of their experiences and believe that the responsibility does not solely fall on the program leadership to shape their experiences. It is evident that the young men are hungry for change. A number of them have taken on the personal challenge of finding other programs across the country in which they could model this program and thus expand the group's mission to a larger scale. Chancellor agrees that establishing it as a student organization would help Men Built with Character elevate itself to the next level:

That right there would put it on a whole other level. It would increase the funding we could have, it would increase, I thought it would increase awareness, it would do a few to make the program that much better if we established you know a board, a typical board, any organization, a federal dress code for the meetings, things like that to you know make it seem legit and you know put some pride into it. So establishing it as a student board could change everything.

During the focus group, Chris added,

[I] would recommend it as an actual organization cause I know right now it's through the office and they only have state funds so they only can do but so much but I really would want to push it to become an organization and create a standard because it would be good to get a lot of the upcoming minority males because we already have a statistic on our heads saying that only a certain amount of us are going to make it, a certain amount of us will drop out and a certain amount of us are just going to quit ... so actually becoming an organization and pushing the name and the brand actually weighing it on us would be a great thing for the organization. We should also reconsider our priorities. What is our purpose and

how does the mission of the program align with the reality of what is being done? I know this is some tough love for Mr. McDonald, but I'm excited to see that I am using what he taught me to critically analyze the program. Maybe everything Mr. McDonald reports us to have done we are doing..... I just do not know. I'm not sure how clear it is. I would say Men Built with Character is more of support group versus anything else.

Traven, Harry, Woody, and Jerry all agreed with Chris's concluding statement;

Men Built with Character has been a rewarding experience for many of the participants.

Ironically enough, although the program has empowered the participants to challenge and support each other, it has also created an environment where the participants are constantly examining the program to ensure it is doing what it was intended to do. While the program certainly has great potential, there is more to be desired in order to create a broader impact on African American males. For instance, there is a need to revamp the program in order to stay current with certain trends facing young Black males today.

Traven concluded,

I don't know if I'm the only one, but I see a lot of potential in Men Built with Character. Because it's a lot of great information, I think a lot of people are missing out. I keep saying this but I really believe that Men Built with Character is really bigger than what people may think. Like it's ... you're developing ... you look at those words – you're developing men built with character. You're helping brothers graduate by increasing the retention rate.

He looked over and asked if I was okay. Based on the look on my face, he could tell that I was in total shock. Chris followed up saying,

Just because we aren't getting a Ph.D. like you, doesn't mean we can't tackle real world issues. I'm not going to say that everyone has different motives behind the work that they do, however, I'm just saying ... can Mr. McDonald get a little help around here.

The fact that the participants recognized the needs of the program and were

strategically trying to address the issues was remarkable. It was obvious that the program instilled a certain confidence in the men, and they inevitably used what they were taught to raise awareness of their situation. Woody commented,

You know in the fall, football season will start. Out of curiosity, do you think the institution is placing as much money and resources into the players as they are the facilities. I mean they might add a couple of tutors and or compliance officers to ensure players are doing what they are supposed to be doing, but just think if Mr. McDonald had some of that money. He has mastered the trick of doing a lot with a little. I could only imagine what he could do if resources weren't as tight. I mean, I'm not hating on the administration, I just want them to be aware of the real world ... there is a slight chance none of them may go Pro. However, it is a strong possibility several of us within this program will top the records in our respective field ... you probably tired of hearing us on our soap box. ... I'm sorry. Let's continue.

During Joshua and Woody's individual interviews, they both expressed feeling extremely empowered as a result of being a part of the program and had a unique appreciation for what the program has done for them, which in turn makes them want to do more for it. They want to find ways to not only correct issues but also to think about improvements in terms of what they can do to bring more black males on board in order for the program to extend its reach. They used this platform as an opportunity to express themselves. As it was obvious that they felt comfortable enough with the researcher to share their thoughts without any hesitation. It was amazing to see them critically dissect the current state of the program in order to brainstorm ways to improve it. Joshua added,

In order to improve our image on campus, increasing our marketing efforts are important. Publicizing who we are and what we do is key. We have to get the name out there because there are ... And so, we really need to get it out there because I think if a lot more Black males knew the benefits of it and knew what it was about, they'd be inclined to come, especially our Black male athletes. Therefore, that's really ... it's just ... publicizing really I think is what we need to do. There's not many ... sure, they send out emails to me and you and people that are a part of it but really just need to get it out to everyone else and that's really the biggest thing I have to say that we really need to do.

During each of the individual interviews, those interviewed agreed that getting more publicity and establishing a marketing plan would allow the program to reach more Black males that need it most. Chancellor commented that,

We can reach them ... let's go that's all it takes, it takes that one group, that one person that's very fortunate, there's always that one person. If you get that one person who has solid grades, great personality, and killer swag ... then everybody is going to follow, they're going to follow you know, I've seen it, I've watched it happen. That's all it takes so.

Strategically thinking, during the focus group, many of the participants referenced the need to explore different avenues to get the word out to entice additional black males to get involved. Realizing the need to move away from a cookie cutter approach, the marketing plans had to be robust in order to have the desired impact they wanted. That stated, using their voice, they felt confident to take their message into the community to solicit funds and new experiences. Chuck suggested that in regards to the marketing plan,

Instead of additional electronic pub, I think we need like an actual plan. I would be more than willing to help Mr. McDonald get the word out. But we gotta get a plan of action in order to maximize our efforts moving forward. Thus ensuring that upper administration and my peers will take us serious. Maybe will can consider posting posters in the union like everyone else does around the rotunda because people get hundreds of emails a day. Honestly, I don't check all my emails because I get so many. If it's not for a class, I just skip over it. But when it is advertised right, people will come out, people will be interested. It's just more like an invitation but not really an invitation...it's a great program. We just need to market what we do better. Maybe Mr. McDonald can assess the members of the program after each year. It probably is very easy to compile the GPAs of the participants and then compare that to non-participants. Lol, hopefully our GPAs are higher than those that aren't apart of the program. If that is the case, BAM, milk it until that well runs dry. Maybe we can connect with local community leaders and kill two birds with one stone. Use our network to connect with popular people around town that would inspire Black males to come out. Think about it, we have two professional sports teams here in town along with regional teams in the sports of baseball, soccer, and hockey. Those organizations give tons to the United Way. I know, because as a child, I went to many summer camps offered by many of the big time players on those teams.

Chris reiterated that,

We know that it works. I can't tell you how each person's grades are within the program, however, I can at least tell you with a great sense of certainty that we all push each other and challenge each other to do better. That's pretty sick. Can you believe this, if we do what we have to do in the classroom, the ball is in our court to make decisions. We give Mr. McDonald additional power to advocate on our behalf.

All of the participants collectively agree that they could effect change. As Makinley put it, "They can improve their ability to brand themselves as the program on campus that everyone wants to be a part of." The males overwhelmingly felt empowered to get the word out. They recognized the impact that the program had had on them and believed that it could do the same for others. However, they also acknowledged the fact that a lot of work needed to be done to enhance the marketing efforts to entice new participants. Traven contends that,

Marketing is a very big thing 'cause this is a huge campus. Like everybody's not going to know about everything unless you really go out there and tell them, "What better story to share, than a story about Black men succeeding in every aspect of the campus environment." Enough stuff out their blaring across mainstream media paints a negative image of Black males. I mean just last night, I caught a glimpse of the six o'clock news and saw at least seven different news stories pertaining to a poor decision another Black male has made. At least with what this program is about, we can go against the grain.

From a review of previous meeting minutes, it is evident the participants want to see the program become so much larger than what it currently is. Traven added that,

I want to say I would like just to see it be a bigger thing. You know what I'm saying. I think it's relatively small and I just...for it to be beneficial to me and beneficial to others, I want it to be bigger. I want it to actually be a student organization where people are actually tweeting or they're having prizes where people just come. I just want it to be more accepted by the university administration. I'm not saying it's not accepted; but it's not as big as Collegiate 100, UBP and I think that's something we're going to try to work on and maybe eventually having something...maybe it might be one of the best things on campus in a long time. Our efforts in the classroom could enhance the overall image of Black students at BJP.

Time after time, many of the guys internally reflected on their experiences with the program and got excited at the possible impact the program could have on other males. On a number of occasions, the phrase "I really want it to have a broader impact on black males" was heard. Traven remarked,

Right now we're trying to get it there ... however, I wonder how much of the success of the program can be attributed to the actual activities put on by the program versus the relationships formed by the members within the program.

In the individual interview with Harry, he noted,

Mr. C., let's take you for granted. The simple fact that you are young and getting your doctorate is enough motivation to inspire even the knuckle head that doesn't want to listen. You able to wear multiple hats and speak different languages. I mean, you can be in a meeting with the chancellor and then turn around and go shoot hoops with the fellas. You can set out a hop with your fraternity and then go do a parent's orientation for incoming freshmen living in the residence halls. Your life is a testimony in and of itself. You probably recognize this but if you don't ... so many of us look up to you. From a cultural perspective, I remember Grandma telling me and my friends that we could do anything we put our minds to. She empowered us to go against the grain in life. When President Obama got into office, my grandma and her friends were so happy. They all said they never thought they would see the day this came to be, but relished in the moment and reminded us that it could be done. I'm sure President Obama recognizes that so many young Black boys are looking up to him and he got a bad ass wife. Excuse my language. But I'm just saying. He got a strong woman on his side working together to run this country. Ya see, people like y'all give me hope.

These men were empowered through their experiences within the program to go out and make a difference in the lives of others. Overall, the participants highlighted the fact that they developed a desire to pay it forward to set the stage up for the next Black male who came through BJP. Regardless of the size of impact they had, they knew for sure that their voices could be used in a way that advocated for their communities' needs.

Sense of Community

Going off to college is an exciting time for most. It is a time when new experiences are attempted, a time when one challenges certain truths previously thought to be the norm, a time when one seeks out to uncover the endless possibilities bestowed upon one. Studies show that Black males attending predominantly white institutions will undoubtedly report an elevated sense of isolation, separation, and unwelcoming atmosphere (Love, 2003; Allen, 1992). To no surprise, the participants within this study described some instances when they have experienced feelings of loneliness, isolation, homesickness, and being overwhelmed and/or out of place. Most of the participants perceived the program to be a community within a community, one that prides itself on having established intentional social connections for the male participants to engage. Men Built with Character helps to establish a sense of brotherhood while providing encouragement and decreasing loneliness, which are three of the subthemes that evolved out of the overall theme of community.

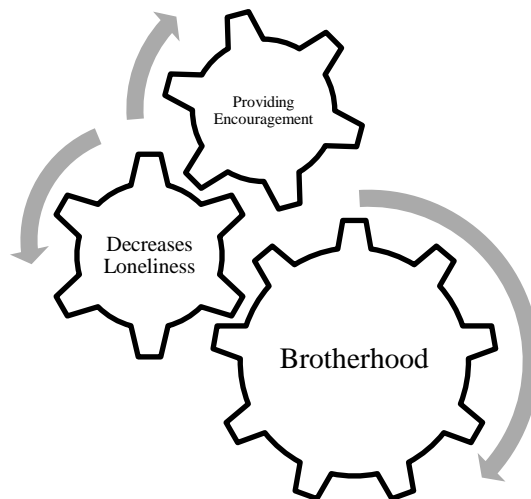


FIGURE 10: Sense of community

During the focus group, the majority of the participants mentioned the fact that involvement within the program helped them establish connections with other Black men. It provided a sense of unity for the participants. All of them noted with a high level of certainty that they believed each of the brothers within the program would look out for each other. Everyone appeared eager to see the next man succeed. Traven shared a glimpse at how his social experience at BJP has been shaped by the program. First, a program like this is so important because "It provides an outlet for you to cut loose with folks that are possibly experiencing similar feelings as you. No one sitting around feeling sorry for you ... everyone simply uplifts you." He went on to say,

The program gives participants the chance to get to know each other from a different vantage point and move beyond surface relationship. I'd say my social life is pretty cool. You know what I'm saying? But I know a lot of people don't really know me ... know me-know me. They know of me, "Okay, this is the guy that he works hard, he's real knowledgeable about certain programs that are going on around campus." Things like that. But I would like for people to get ... there's certain people that really know me for who I am and there are certain people they just kind of see ... they're on the outside looking in. I don't want everybody in my business but I would also like some people to be inside and know who I am and get to really know me instead of just the outside appearance that they may see from time to time in class. So I really want people to get to know me as far as that. It's not really like I think they'll view me different or anything like that. It is what it is. For me, I'm being myself 24/7 trying to keep it 100. The program gives me that outlet to let my guard down. I feel as if we are all in it for the right reason. It gives me the confidence to get socially charged before entering the real world.

With the participants in this study hailing from a variety of places around the world, the program appeared to act as a refuge for some, providing the comfort they needed in order to navigate through their collegiate experience. As with any tight-knit community, the members had come to recognize that a solid support system existed. They can drop in at any time to see Mr. McDonald. If he is not available, they typically work together outside the program to resolve whatever issue they are facing. From the

researcher's observations, the brotherhood that has formed within the program appears to be intentionally designed to serve the extremely outgoing individual as well as the introvert who needs a little prying to get out and explore. In Chancellor's individual interview, he describes a perfect example of how the brotherhood supports numerous types of students.

I'm slowly branching out a little bit and the program gives me the space to venture out without feeling too overwhelmed. I'm a very private person at times; kind of, you know I like to stay in my own little area. I kind of like to be careful when I step up. One thing with me I don't want to follow ... I don't have that follower mentality. You know what I'm saying ... you have a group of guys, I don't know if you've notice, there's a leader and he's usually like the ones the guys don't forget, he's the best dressed, all the girls love him you know he's articulate, perfect. Then you have the flunky ones is what I call them 'cause he has an advantage over them in some kind of way. Maybe there's one guy, he's really cool he's got a great personality but he doesn't have what girls are looking for. There's the guy that can dress but you know it could be maybe his personality is not right. Just I mean I don't have ... I'm not I don't feel like I would fit into the group entirely 'cause they all kind of look to that one guy. What are we doing tonight? You know look man what are we doing tonight? You know what are we doing tomorrow, what do you want to do, he's the one calling all the shots. What he says goes and they all kind of you know stroke his ego and things like that and I'm just not, that's not me I'm not going to do that. And so I don't really like to hang around those types of people. However, the program gave me the opportunity to meet a few guys that I feel comfortable around. Actually, we feel pretty comfortable with each other. I would describe all of us as extreme introverts but when we get around each other ... you probably couldn't tell. My boys help me recharge and regroup before going back and dealing with the foolishness. We check each other and push each other to be better. We also hold each other accountable. I guess, it would be pretty challenging for me to figure this out on my own if this program did not exist. I guess I could find a group that I would want to hang around, but the program already created the foundation for us to come together.

Surprisingly, the close-knit brotherhood also helped individuals who were shy blossom out of their comfort zone, as seen in Chancellors response above. Time after time, the program provided an environment where the participants could ease into experiences without feeling as if they were forced to take part. According to Joshua,

It just ... it really provides that sense of brotherhood because now I want to succeed but at the same time I want to see you succeed so whatever I do and whatever I ... whatever morals and values I have that are going to help me get to the point where I'm going to get, I'm going to share it with him and vice versa. It just ... it really ... Like I said, it just provides a sense of brotherhood and how you not only want to see yourself succeed but you want to bring everyone else with you.

The experiences of black males on the campus range in a variety of ways.

However, the constant within this program centers on this idea of creating a sense of community. As in a real world setting, one typically feels comfortable to engage with their neighbors within their respective community to address problems that may arise. When opportunities present themselves to celebrate new experiences and/or be a support system in the time of need, the community typically rallies together and fills in the gap. In a similar way, said Joshua, "[T]his program reinforces the notion that succeeding is something I can do." This was a powerful feeling. Over time, this tight-knit community has grown such that every member recognizes the need to encourage the others to persist to their respective degrees. In addition, a few of the participants referenced how the actions of the group, their community, directly impacted how their peers perceived them.

Notes taken during the retreat at Camp Kungua helped the researcher to recognize the fact that their young men's efforts will impact the men who will join the program in the future at the institution. From a racial perspective, the men felt as if they had to work twice as hard to improve perceptions of Black male students on behalf of the students who would come after them. Particularly in the classroom, a number of participants shared some of the challenges they have faced and how they have used this community to assist them in dealing with their issues. In his individual interview, Woody referenced a particular experience that demonstrates this perspective.

As a Systems Engineering major, most days I go to class and intentionally sit in the front of the class to ensure I am able to connect with the professor and avoid any distractions. I recall when I was a freshman, being Black and a male was such a negative experience for me in class. No one (peers and some professors) ever took me serious. Many of my classmates referenced the fact that the initial courses were designed to be weed out classes and most minority students changed majors because the classes were pretty challenging. Folks in the back of the class would constantly make jokes about how few African American students were in the class and would often laugh when they came to class and saw another empty seat where a minority student once sat. I was determined to succeed. During the rap sessions, I found myself venting frustration and gathering a game plan for how to combat this foolish behavior. A few brothers were older than me in the program and had already taken a few classes. They helped me deal with my frustration and channel my energy in order to progress forward. Through those heart felt moments, I learned how to address the negative comments my classmates made. Having a place to vent gave me the strength in order to thrive in the classroom. I know my efforts won't go in vain. My actions will impact the next brother that comes to BJP. I won't give them no extra fuel to discourage my brothers.

In an effort to portray their race and gender in an encouraging way, many of the participants strived to be positive examples for others.

As the researcher, listening to the stories offered by the participants added depth and breadth to the overall understanding of their perceptions of the program. However, the actions of the participants led the researcher to question whether a black male inferiority complex exists among some of the participants within the program. This was certainly not the case for everyone; however, many of the participants in the study alluded to a certain level of doubt and/or uncertainty regarding their ability to take part in the college experience. That was, paradoxically, in spite of their burgeoning self-confidence. Whether the thoughts came about subconsciously or not, their actions reinforced the notion that there was some type of requirement for them to prove why they were present as opposed to commanding respect because of the endless possibility of what they could contribute in or outside of the classroom. In a number of instances, black

males have been conditioned within society to believe they do not belong. Therefore, the community within the community has a responsibility to combat this negative idea and create an environment where the previously unthinkable becomes attainable.

The participants noted during the focus group that they felt as if the community instilled in them a personal drive to overcome the odds of falling by the wayside. The participants referenced the fact that from a cultural perspective, it is not often that black males see other black males cheering each other on to obtain their goals. It is not the socially acceptable thing to do. However, it is astonishing how these young men supported each other. Each of their stories gives credence to why such a program is so important. Consider Joshua's comment during his individual interview,

Culturally, it really ... it affirms your belief that you can graduate and that you can go on, because now you have people behind you saying you can do it. This ultimately further develops the self-confidence in the members within the program. People that look like you are behind you and saying that. You know. "You can do it. I'm gonna make it. I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna graduate and I'm gonna make eighty thousand dollars right off the bat." That's only going to drive me to go out and make eighty one thousand dollars right off the bat. We subconsciously challenge each other by just setting our goals and stating them and putting them out there.

At the bare minimum, the community within a community enhanced the self-confidence of each member. A brotherhood existed which motivates each of the members to want to do better and succeed. and many of the participants acknowledged the fact that the community built within the program decreases loneliness. Joshua adds that,

The program has been extremely helpful in making sure that I understand that I am not alone at BJP and has helped me solidify the path I am taking to achieve my goals, it just ... it really made me seem like not only that I'm not alone but everyone else is trying to achieve the same thing.

There is a true support system that permeates through all facets of the experience. Makinley adds that the program has been "really helpful and lets you know it gives you a

support system and a network of other black men who are trying to be successful just like you. And Mr. McDonald reassures you that you are not here alone." It has made such a great impact on the participants and they overwhelmingly felt like from a social perspective, it gave them the encouragement they needed to press forward each day.

During Woody's individual interview, he noted,

I've been to a whole lot of Men Built with Character events, we definitely try to let black men, and black women as well know that they're not alone here. I think college is different in that like your support system is a little smaller and I feel away from home but like you have to find positive people and place them around you so that you have something to fall back on. Like sometimes it's lonely in college but this program gives you that outlet to stay connected and engaged.

During Jerry's individual interview, he also acknowledged that "Men Built with Character has been beneficial in helping me realize that I am not alone at this predominantly white institution. I have other brothers I can reach out to and hold accountable and be held accountable as well." All in all, the community established within this program has created an environment in which participants can come together to engage in robust dialogue about a variety of issues prevalent at the time. The group has developed accountability among the brothers that keeps everyone in line and focused on attaining their end goals. Additionally, it serves as an outlet for some to simply get away from the daily routine. The community provides a unique sounding board in which participants can amplify their voices to be heard.

Academic and Social Integration

The following sub-themes surfaced under the larger theme of "academic and social integration": providing awareness, instilling resiliency, and offering each participant an opportunity to grow. These themes led the researcher to better understand how the program facilitates academic and social integration for program participants. Each of these themes will be discussed below.

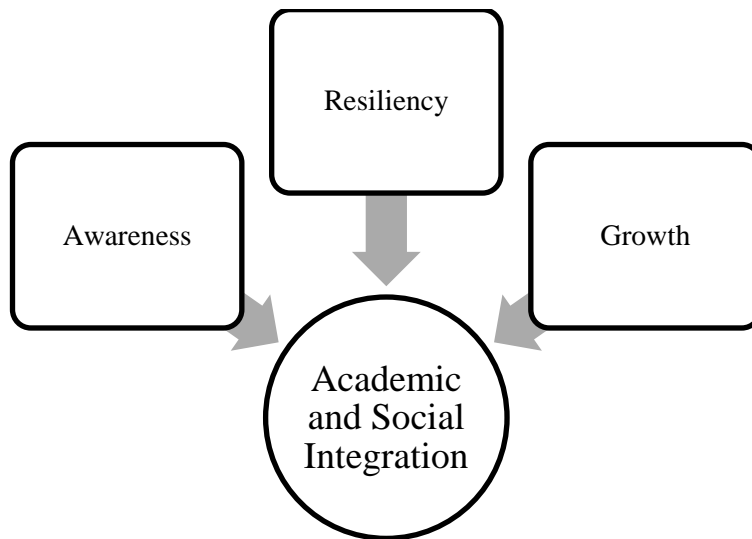


FIGURE 11: Academic and social integration

Awareness

The program provides a sense of awareness for the resources available to the students. It serves as a liaison between the student and the resources available on campus.

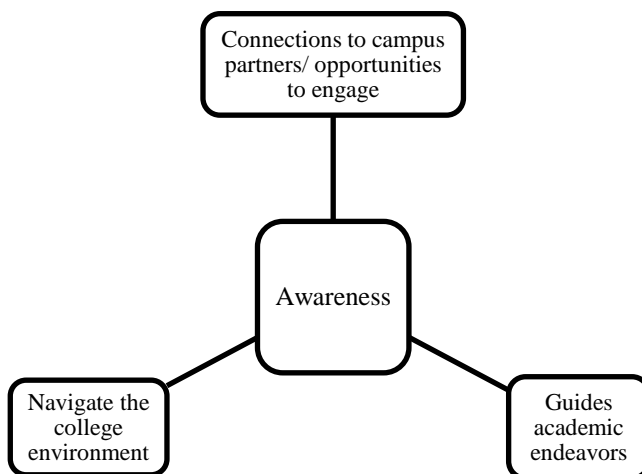


FIGURE 12: Awareness

During the focus group, many of the participants remarked how their involvement in the program exposed them to life at BJP. They received help on navigating their collegiate environment and guiding their academic endeavors. As it relates to academics, the men helped each other out in a variety of ways, from providing feedback on previous instructors to helping each other prepare for exams when needed. On the social side, the program presented the young men with a variety of opportunities to get involved and connected. Unfortunately, for most of the young black males in this study, they simply were not aware of all that the campus had to offer them as they matriculated towards their degree. Men Built with Character not only pointed them in the right direction of available resources, but also helped them to be accountable for their actions in their quest to graduate. Three subthemes emerged: "connections to campus partners and opportunities to engage," "ability to navigate the collegiate environment," and "guidance for academic endeavors."

Interpersonal connections were a common thread that ran through the data on awareness. Many of the participants shared how they learned about the program by

watching the counselors in We Soar, a five-week summer collegiate experience designed to help underrepresented students transition from high school to college. The students took college courses and received intentional assistance from University academic support services. Through this experience, several of the participants referenced the experiences they had with certain male counselors in We Soar. From their perspective, these men were on top of their game. They were poised, exuded confidence, and kept things light-hearted. For the counselors, maintaining such a demeanor enticed the young men to get connected to them. The counselors knew in advance that they wanted to get these young men connected to Men Built with Character, so they used their power to attract them to get involved. Indeed, the participants talked often about how the upperclassmen were such great mentors to them and were doing things in and out of the classroom. From the experience the guys gained from We Soar during the summer, they were able to start the year out already having a small community of friends. Some of them used this experience to figure out how to stay connected on campus. Makinley said during his individual interview,

Just from We Soar I had already knew a whole lot of people around campus and I pride myself on trying to like meet new people and expand and network and branch out. I just joined University Scholars, which is a group of black men who volunteer and try to give back to the BJP community.

Trying to juggle what is cool in the eyes of their peers challenged some of the guys to take their time in figuring out whether they wanted to get involved in any groups or activities. Many of the guys expressed that it was important to them to be accepted by the in crowd and that they allowed that desire for acceptance to dictate what types of activities they got involved in. On the other hand, a few of the guys in this study had

transferred to BJP. Instead of making a hasty decision to get involved, some participants described how they methodically took their time to figure out what made the most sense for them. A perfect example of this attitude can be seen in Harry's response from his individual interview:

Last semester, I simply had to take my time to get connected. With so much to offer within my major and around campus, I just didn't know what I wanted to do. I did not want to jump into something and haven't done my research. Now I feel much more prepared because I took the advice of my counselor from We Soar and scouted out what I wanted to get myself into.

Surprisingly enough, although Harry took the methodical approach to getting connected, many of his peers put pressure on him to get involved. Again, it was an older brother in the program who put it plain and simple for him. He recalled when an older member named Scott simply stated,

Yo, getting involved is just going to separate you from different people with whom you will interact with on a daily basis. You know. You can graduate. You can get 3.5 GPA but employers are going to look at that as average if that's all you did ... you know, you're pretty much an average Joe. You didn't really do anything to contribute to campus or join any activities. So they're saying that really, you know, being different so when they see my resume they see, You got to figure out what makes you tic and roll with it.

Overall, the participants recognized the need to think through the experiences they got involved in. A number of examples were given by the participants regarding the importance of getting involved, which ultimately influenced a lot of the things they did throughout their time thus far at the university. It was pretty clear in the end that the participants bought into the need to shape their time at the institution to ensure their overall experience was rich and holistically integrated.

Some of the participants reflected on their own initial lack of awareness in navigating their collegiate experience. Many of them went off to college eager to figure out their unique fit within the college landscape, but they lacked a true understanding of how to prioritize the experiences they would have. For example, James Frankie noted during his individual interview that he jumped into college feet first ready to figure out how to navigate the collegiate terrain on the fly:

First semester I was involved with CAB, helped them out being on the event staff. What else have I done, I actually got into RTD, Road to Damascus, started going there, a little bit involved there and what else was I doing, My first semester I was involved with United Black Professionals. I was kind of like doing marketing and things for them and what not.

The beauty of his remark is that he was inspired to get involved by an older male in Men Built with Character who had served as a counselor for We Soar. Essentially, the participants were given the tools necessary to construct their own college experiences. However, the ability to engage with older brothers who had already encountered certain experiences proved to shape the young participants' time within the program in a variety of ways. It made them more aware of their surroundings and how to navigate their environment. Many of the participants highlighted the fact that the program provided a number of resources to set the students up for success. Ironically enough, some of the guys jokingly acknowledged that there were some great resources, but that the resources were only great if they, the men, actually used them. Makinley emphatically agreed. The fact that the program has many workshops that "make sure that we are on the right track and they introduce us to various resources that we may or may not have known about and it just it holds us accountable." During the focus group, Traven added,

Men Built with Character helped me open my eyes to the resources around campus. It was a lot of the things and the organizations that the campus had offered likeUCAE, even tutorial services that I mean I guess, as a minority really didn't know too much about but Men Built with Character kind of opened my eyes to those programs and allowed me to take advantage of those.

The program exposed the men to new opportunities regardless of whether they had transferred into BJP or were admitted from the start. During the focus group, Chuck gave a specific example of how he benefited greatly from Men Built with Character even before he came to college:

I had a slightly different challenge as it relates to exposure. I really needed Men Built with Character to point me in the right direction towards resources that I could utilize. While attending the community college, we actually came here on a field trip, that is how I met Mr. McDonald, and I learned about the Men Built with Character program before I was even a student here. And so when I finally did transfer here, I already had somewhere I could go and people I could talk to, to answer questions because of the bridge that was already created when I transferred. And I think it really helped as far as even what class selection or just having somebody on campus to talk to because when you first transfer here you don't know anybody and you're not a freshman and so you're not afforded a lot of the bridge things that they get to help them get into the programs and stuff. So it was really important to have somebody to talk to ... But coming out here, like I said, I came from such a small school to such a big ... it's just it was dramatic, like dramatic difference and I came from nothing there and to here and so I needed to find a way to be able to connect and get used to being at such a huge place. I was such a small person in a big place. That's how Men Built with Character has helped me kind of get in the groove ... At first it wasn't as good because I just had to ... I really had to get used to the system because transferring here just off gate just coming here, this is out of the ordinary for me because I ... like I said, this is the most white people I've been around ever, and just the whole system is just damn different. Like you go in a classroom, you have three tests and it's like sink or swim. It's no in between. Either you do well or you do badly. You mess up on a test, it's like, "Oh my gosh." So at first it really wasn't that good. It took me some time to really get acquainted and learn about the methods and how I could adjust my study and my study habits and get my skills up. So now, it's like I'm on track now.

As anticipated, many of the participants referenced how the program provided academic guidance. Reviewing the archival documents helped the researcher to frame how academic support took shape within the program. First and foremost, the program created a comfort level similar to how one may feel at home. When the participants came around program leaders, the leaders were able to stay calm and relaxed as they handled various situations. The opportunity to pose questions and challenge appropriately existed. If questions came forth about any particular topic, there was no hesitation to seek out the answer. The participants within the study ranged in classification from second semester freshmen to senior, and the program was designed to meet everyone's needs regardless of classification, as opposed to a one size fits all approach. Chris, like many other the participants, highlighted the fact that he constantly found himself becoming aware of new options he could take advantage of to support his academic pursuits. He added that,

At a workshop recently, they showed every graduate program that they had at the school and they got me interested in looking in to the MBA program for when I graduate. Even though it's far off, I wouldn't have considered it as an option because I didn't know anything about it. And also, the financial aid, that really helped because I wouldn't be in school without it either.

The workshops were informative and provided options for his career. In addition, he was able to gain valuable information regarding financial aid, which he took back and shared with his friends.

Perhaps the best part of the program as it relates to academic and social integration for Makinley has been the abundance of opportunities and resources that the program affords to the participants. It has really helped to guide him in his academic pursuits: Makinley explained,

The opportunities and resources from Men Built with Character are a beneficial part of the program. The programs for the most part are informative. The smallest thing that I guess the average person might take for granted is always an eye opener for us. For example, I remember what it was like filling out all those applications for undergrad. I got into everyone I applied but I was not sure exactly what I would ultimately end up doing. Now that I'm on the verge of completing graduate school applications, the workshops are extremely helpful. Who knows how to write a personal statement? It's still a little early for me, but at least I have a blueprint of what one looks like. You constantly find out so many small things like that which end up helping so many people.

A review of program documents affords a glimpse at the strategies and resources that have been used to promote academic and social integration. At the beginning of the year, programs were conducted that introduced the participants to faculty, staff, older members of the program, and alumni who were all eager to assist the men in their success at BJP. Deliberate efforts were made to ensure that the participants clearly understood the mission of the program. Along those same lines, a foundation was established among the participants where they could engage with one another and seek out new experiences together. Jerry noted that the program made him aware of various resources and explained how it has helped him in his academic endeavors:

It really helped me orient to different resources on campus – Men Built with Character was more so like someone I can lean on. If I had a question, if they couldn't answer it they could refer me to a resource that could answer that question for me. It didn't matter whether it was academic, social, or financial. Men Built with Character was there to aid and assist.

Understanding the academic and social integration experienced by the participants helped staffers structure how these two aspects of the program worked in tandem to support the men. From the very beginning, when the men came off to school, some took part in programs such as We Soar, while others established support networks of friends.

Those experiences helped the young men to become more intentional about their academic endeavors. Occasionally, they reverted back to their support network of friends when they needed to push forward towards graduation. At times, it appeared as if the men within the program used the relationships among them and the older brothers that had already been in the program to guide their experiences. The men intentionally used each other to shape their collegiate experience, helping each other to figure out what, when and/or how to get involved. Overall, as the participants became more aware of and/or knowledgeable about the opportunities to integrate the academic and social aspects of the program into their everyday life, they felt motivated to accomplish their goals without giving up. If they came across an issue, they were aware of the right people to help them resolve their issues. Some experiences have been great, while others were not as positive but still turned into unforgettable life lessons.

Resiliency

Findings from this study suggest that simply seeing others participate in the program encouraged many of the participants to want to do more with their lives.



Figure 13: Resiliency

For most of the participants, a resiliency developed as they trudged through their collegiate experience at BJP. Some of the participants in this study came to college with a very limited perspective of how their own experiences could be. They had layers of self-

doubt, were unaware of available resources, and had the awkward feeling of being the only one who looked like them in some of their classes. These were just a few examples the participants gave while reflecting on their academic and social integration into the institution. Two subthemes emerged out of the larger theme of resiliency: "overcoming obstacles" and "success is attainable." As the program coordinator, Mr. McDonald, noted in one of the interviews,

Many of the guys in the program don't know much of anything with regards to the endless possibilities college can afford them. Very few have been told the sky is the limit. A few of their family members went to college, but for the most part, these young men must fight for what they want if they want to succeed.

From a thorough review of the data, the researcher deduced that each of the participants possessed a determination to overcome whatever challenges they were presented in order to reach their goal of obtaining a college degree. Failure was not an option for any of the participants, and the workshops offered by the program were suggested to have an immense impact on how the young men acclimated to college. The program and staff helped to uplift and encourage them to persevere. As a first-year student went off to college, Traven jokingly reminisced on his freshman year:

Hey guys, y'all remember that song in church that went like this ... "He's an on time God ... yes, he is ... He may not come when you want him, but he'll be there right on time" ... doesn't that song reflect this program. {Laugh} Mr. McDonald always knows the right thing to say or do to hook a brother up.

Consistent with the literature on resiliency, the men in this study attributed where they are today to a few individuals reaching out to them and serving as their rock to stand on in times of need. Whether during the focus group or within the individual interviews, all of the participants shared unique experiences they encountered throughout their lives. Some were more devastating than others, but the common thread was the fact that they all

possessed the mental fortitude to persevere and go against the grain of mediocrity. The tenacity to obtain their goals was a reoccurring theme that came forth in their interviews, the documents that the researcher reviewed, and in candid moments that the researcher observed. All of these participants possessed an intrinsic motivation to succeed no matter the cost or sacrifice. Some motivation came from the fact that family and friends were living vicariously through them, while others were inspired by the sheer determination to chase after their own individual dreams.

As an observer looking into the program, it was obvious that a certain level of confidence developed within these men because they took part in Men Built with Character. In some instances, the confidence emanating from the men was contagious. The experiences some of these men have been afforded provided additional exposure beyond their wildest imaginations. It enhanced their academic pursuit and built up their confidence level to be able to believe in themselves when no one else was around. As an example, out of everything that Men Built with Character does, Harry mentioned that he is extremely grateful for the opportunities to engage in undergraduate research. As a pre-Kinesiology major, he felt he could become more knowledgeable about his field by engaging in research. He chuckled when he shared this and said that it is

only because someone in the program did it that I am doing it now. Now, I'm becoming more known in my department and opportunities are becoming available for me to take advantage of. In a few years, you gonna see me on a billboard as you ride down 85 and be like ... your boy made it.

Mr. McDonald said during his individual interview that overcoming obstacles and helping the students to look past challenges is a large part of how the program helps students to succeed. As students at BJP, many of them faced challenges concerning social

pressures imposed on them internally and externally. The participants communicated that Men Built with Character served as a social outlet for each of them. During the focus group and in some of the individual interviews, the conversation took on the tone of an outcry for help. Some of the participants shared personal struggles they face regularly, and it was interesting to see how the men worked together to help their brothers cope with whatever they were facing. For example, Joshua shared in his individual interview that,

My greatest challenge as a Black male at BJP has been trying to prove myself to my peers. I'm serious about my education and I'm dedicated in what I do because sometimes they think, I'm joking, I'm trying to put on or show off, and the most frustrating thought is that they think I'm trying to act like I'm white or I'm dressing different or I'm acting different. Because sometimes when you're trying to be social and you don't really have the social life you're used to in high school – your homeboy hollering in your ear, "What's good, what's going on for today?" But when you are ... well me personally, when I'm in school it's kind of, like I have to get something done. Time is very valuable to me and I'm pretty sure it's very valuable to you as well. When I first got up here my first challenge was just kind of getting to fit in, getting to know people 'cause at first it was kind of hard 'cause it's such a big difference from my previous school. There, everybody knew everybody. At BJP, you see somebody new every day. You know what I'm saying? Whether it's a new female, a new guy, you're going to see somebody new, I guarantee it. When folks start getting fresh with me, I find myself retreating off to my own world. I know y'all feel me, right?

Unfortunately, many of the participants expressed this idea of not wanting to be perceived as acting White by their peers. They simply wanted to be perceived as acting like themselves. Shockingly, a few participants said that their same-race peers at times gave them a harder time than peers outside their race did. This internal oppression actually brought the men closer to each other from a safety standpoint. They clustered together, so to speak, to avoid having to deal with the external ridicule alone. Probing a

little deeper uncovered the fact that many of the guys felt like there was not much of a difference at times with how peers that looked like them acted/treated them as opposed to peers that looked differently. They felt as if they got negative energy thrown on them from all directions. Not surprisingly, this proved to be a very challenging position in which to be. Some asked, what does acting White have to do with their ability to succeed in the classroom, dress a certain way, or carry oneself in a manner different from what some folks may be used to? Chancellor shared during the focus group that his social challenges are internal and self-imposed:

One fault of mine is that I'm a very trusting initially when I first get to know people. And that messed me up when I first got here, there are people that you know, I don't know but I'm pretty sure some people were dragging my name through the mud just a little bit that didn't even know me and who knew nothing about me. That's again black people, what's wrong with us man, anyway, you know that's what I was dealing with so socially just getting myself together and learning not to trust everybody, you can't. I'm not going to change how I dress because someone thinks differently of me. You know, I give people too many chances and you know I've gotten better with that though so it's been yeah; trusting the professors and the social aspect as far as trusting goes.

Although many of the participants experienced social challenges in a variety of ways, and it is a natural feeling to consider giving up when times may seem rough, many of the participants showed resiliency in their ability to bounce back from the difficulties and setbacks they faced in life. A certain level of determination has developed in many of them, resulting in an enhanced quest for success. In essence, they have learned from the numerous experiences they have encountered that they can approach adversity square on with confidence. Regardless of the circumstance, many teachable moments have been taken from the experiences gained from the program. Many of the participants vividly challenge past thoughts of self-doubt. During the focus group, almost all of the

participants referred to reflection time at their retreat. During this time, a number of them shared stories of how in the past, they would blame themselves, circumstances, or other people for their mishaps. However, over time, through experiences gained at the retreat and at a number of rap sessions, they have bought into the idea that they are in total control of their fate. While issues may emerge that require them to readjust their approach, successfully accomplishing their end goal is constantly at the forefront of everything they set out to do.

While the program strived to prepare the participants to be successful, many of the participants within the study expressed that they did not feel that they were successful. Success from their vantage point had not been achieved yet because they have larger goals in mind. During the focus group, Chuck shared his perspective:

Honestly, I don't feel as successful as I should be. I feel like ... honestly, I'm inventing something right now and I feel like I should have been done but social aspects get in the way and all these student organizations get in the way. No, don't get in the way but take me away from time from inventing my idea, what I've been thinking of since freshman year, since I started freshman year and doesn't take that long to finish anything, I believe. If you really want it done ... if I really wanted it done, it could have been done earlier. I feel like I'm kind of slacking in that area (as it relates to my goals). I procrastinate. Even in class, I wait until the last minute to do something. I might get a good grade on it but that moment of stress just makes every ... like that day of stress you get just makes your heart race and I do the same thing with my goals like, "Oh, I got like a year to do this or add this minor or add this major. I need to hurry up. I need to take summer classes." And it's like I put so much stress on myself at one time because I don't want to break it out. So I feel like ... as a student, I think I'm successful but as an individual, I don't think I'm quite there yet. Just ... I could have graduated in three years but then I just ... I didn't want to take 18 credit hours for these last two semesters and I didn't want to take summer classes last summer. So I'm taking the extra ... I'm taking the regular amount of time of four years to graduate but I feel like if I was on my stuff I could have been out ... not could have been out ... I could have had a job by now, I could have been doing something more prevalent like doing what I really wanted to do.

Jerry made comments along similar lines:

I feel like I am but then I'm not. I feel like I'm successful because I'm here but I feel like I'm on a path to success but I feel like I still have a long way to go because I have a lot of goals to accomplish, a lot of things that I want to do.

Traven rendered a slightly different perspective. His success revolves around his environment. He doesn't see himself as being successful because he has not yet "arrived."

However, he contends that,

I do feel like I'm successful, being that from ... you know, my family, I'm the only one in college and ... see, my mom didn't go to college and my dad, he went to ... I believe he went to Shaw. It's one of them HBCUs in the Raleigh/Durham area. I'm not quite sure. That's pretty sad. I should know that. But I think I'm very successful, being just like at a UVA institution and a school like this. I think this is very recognizable and being what I'm trying to do – I'm trying to be a political scientist and this is the perfect place. This is a hub for government activity so I don't think I'm successful yet but I think I have succeeded so far.

The participants' definitions of success varied to some degree. However, one could see that each of them possessed a certain resolve to obtain the level of success each of them strived for. Chris, on the other hand, is more optimistic:

I am becoming successful and I will become successful. But at this point I'm in the construction stage and I need to you know kind of build myself, build my character, build my personality and you know basically start a foundation for my future career, am I successful, I was successful in getting here but the road has really just begun.

Like Chris, Makinley's perception of success was defined by just how far he had come.

The researcher, humbled by their responses, could only offer a word of encouragement.

Makinley noted that, "I think I'm on my way to success cause just being here is part of the goal. Like if, I didn't make it to college then I wouldn't be able to get a degree or anything

else so I feel like being here has put me on a road to success." When asked whether he was confident that he would succeed, Woody responded,

Yes definitely. Especially with the programs that BJP has, especially the engineering program. Like I said, it's not easy, it's challenging, and so I really do think that it will afford me the opportunity to move on and get a Master's and to move on and get a PhD, just because of the way they're preparing me now. All the teachers and all the professors within our program are great. They want to see you succeed. They're not like that Earth Science professor that was blatantly trying to knock me down. They really ... they want to see you make that stride because not only will you succeed but it looks good for the program and makes it seem like they're doing their job and they're doing their job great. At this point, I'm really confident. I really ... like I said, I really think I picked the right major, especially in going to a co-op last summer at automotive manufacturing company, that really confirmed it as well because I'm in the job field. I'm applying the same things that they've taught me in class, especially my engineering class last year and literally the same exact terms that they were using – and all these Japanese terms, I used while on my co-op. It really validates the fact that I'm in the right field, which I was able to go out and enjoy it and it gives me even more motivation when I come back to school and I'm doing it because I see the light at the end of the tunnel. I'm definitely enjoying it.

Chris' confidence is shown through his beliefs. "Yes sir I feel confident with that I feel like all things are possible through God." Makinley too is optimistic. "I have no doubt in my mind that I will accomplish my educational and career goal, just because I'm that driven." Overall, the academic and social integration of the program pushed the participants in the study to accomplish their goals without giving up. If they came across an issue, they were presented with the right people to help them resolve the issue.

Growth

Some experiences have been great, and others have turned into life lessons that, ideally, the participants will never forget. After reviewing past flyers of programs offered by Men Built with Character, it is evident that the program affords its participants a

variety of opportunities to grow intellectually, personally and professionally, with the intent of creating a holistic collegiate experience. Terri, one of the Program Founders, noted,

[T]he program instills that can-do spirit in the young men's life. Realizing that many of the men we serve come off to college with limited perspectives of what the college experience can/should look like, we have the opportunity to invest in each of their lives. It can be taxing from an administrative standpoint since the program has limited staff, but you simply do what you can.

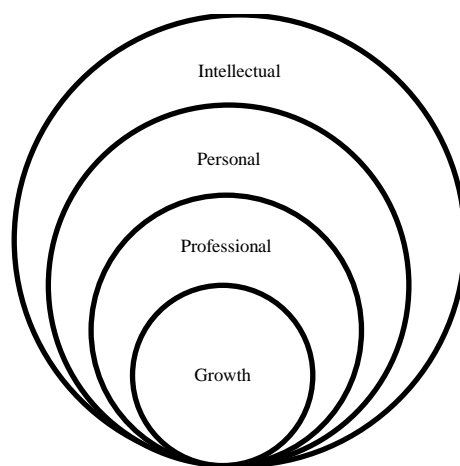


FIGURE 14: Growth

Men Built with Character impacts the males intellectually through knowledge that they are gaining from the rap sessions. It challenges them to think differently and to do things differently. It assists them with establishing solid relationships amongst themselves, as well as with faculty/staff across campus. It provides a foundation on which they can build their networks.

Whether working on a school assignment or doing something leisurely, the participants raved during the focus group about how the program enabled them to grow intellectually. It challenged the way they approached certain things in the past and created an environment where individuals struggling to figure out sound study skills and

techniques, for example, could be taught. The men within the program often talked about various experiences they encountered. Whether a given experience was good, bad, or indifferent, opportunities for growth were ever-present. Jerry discussed how much the program has challenged his initial way of doing things: "[E]very week I learn something new or I get an informative message from attending the rap sessions, just things that I need to know or things that you wouldn't think you need reach so many people, so many students."

The program enhanced participants' knowledge capacity by constantly disseminating information pertaining to Men Built with Character events and outside programs amongst the brotherhood. In addition, a thorough review of the historical documents revealed that in the past a variety of workshops have been put on, covering topics ranging from financial aid to financial literacy. Retreats occur annually, typically in the spring, and rap sessions occur frequently. Traven discussed a time when he actually did not want to go to one particular program because it did not seem interesting to him, but he went anyway and gained a wealth of knowledge. If he had not gone to the particular program, he would have missed out on an important growth opportunity.

But I went and I actually learned a thing or two that's pretty much going to help me out pretty much for my next few years, is like the sub, and unsub loan. I learned the difference between those two. It was just ... it's just little things like that that I learn from Men Built with Character that helps me throughout my life. You never know what you'll learn by going through these workshops. We have great speakers that come and speak that are really influential in what they do and whatnot and I think a lot of people are missing out on listening and observing and just getting all these details. 'Cause a lot of times I go to these workshops, I'm typing down what they're saying. They put in some good quotes. I put it in and maybe over the summer I can look over it and really get my mind of what they were saying that I typed in.

During Chris's individual interview, he was overjoyed to share how Men Built with Character had prepared him to be successful through providing him wisdom that he can transfer to other aspects of his academics:

I've got the chance to go to some of the workshops and they've really helped me capitalize on resources, financial aid, things of that nature, programs of people who are coming in, basically, I guess people who are giving symposiums, lectures or whatever. I'm getting like a lot of you know wisdom and I'm also getting a lot of personal resources that I'm able to tap into.

Personal growth, particularly as it relates to building relationships, emerged as a theme of this study. Some participants are outgoing, while others are somewhat reserved and a little conservative in their initial interactions with others. The program helps members to make those important connections with individuals and the program. The participants used Men Built with Character as a network amongst themselves to foster collaboration. Many of the participants referenced how the program exposed them to opportunities to network with individuals that looked like them. They recognized that, beyond the program, there were very few options besides fraternities where Black men could come together on campus and engage with one another. Some of the participants highlighted how being a part of the program introduced them to individuals they had never known. Many of the attitudes surrounding this particular thought suggested that they were eager to develop relationships in order to find commonality with their peers. Chuck shared that his greatest challenge at BJP has been building relationships, and that the program has been instrumental in helping him build a network of individuals with whom he can stay connected:

Where I'm from, well, a lot of people network. Like, you actually maintain relationships, you actually keep in contact, but it seems like here people just put it on as a front like you exchange information for nothing. Cause I was like, okay by

exchanging information, we are going to stay connected. And it's like you do but you don't really exchange information, it's like you don't really do a follow up, you don't really do any check ins. That's probably one of my biggest problems here and some people are out there and don't talk to you cause you know this isn't the community school so it's like really hard to form relationships here because some people are just self-centered to me and that's kind of a big challenge here. Maybe my experience is slightly different from most because I transferred to BJP, but damn ... aren't we all here to help each other reach our goals ... I guess not. I know I sound angry, but I actually am. If it wasn't for my brothers in the program, I could literally walk around this campus stuck in a bubble.

In Jerry's individual interview, he mentions that Men Built with Character is that bridge that connects him to other people to whom he can relate and with whom he can establish meaningful bonds.

A network in itself. Just being able to go and talk to this guy or talk to this guy and just say, "Oh I know him. That is my Men Built with Character brother," and like I've met a couple people like, like Woody, people like that, just who are doing so well or trying to do the same thing that I'm trying to do. And just to meet likeminded brothers is great anytime.

For Chris, the program has provided the platform to create lasting and meaningful relationships that are beneficial. He asserts that,

Networking has been great with helping him make connections. It's impacted me personally, because, like I said, I'm really the kind of person that sticks to myself and I really ... I'm not a conversation seeker who will go out and just randomly just start conversations if I don't really have to. But being in a program where I can just meet other people and meet those people who I would have never, ever, ever would have talked to because I'm not really that outgoing is just great because it helps me out in so many ways because I have this person right here who can help me do this or I have this person who knows this photography man. There are many connections.

As in the story that Danny shared during his individual interview, time after time, the men in the program were making connections with individuals through each other.

Danny shared that Bobbie Green, a longtime supporter of Men Built with Character,

introduced a concept called "netweaving." The premise behind the concept is simple. He described it as follows:

You and I may know each other, but I can connect you to a third person. I may know you and I know James but I get you and James together and then you guys branch out and I watch that umbrella unfold. Because you guys now are taking your networking of people, individuals, contacts, and now I helped bridge this relationship, but we take the reins and expand upon it.

The program has served as a means for the participants to explore different perspectives, views and ways of doing things. It provides an outlet for the men to come together and exchange thoughts. Chancellor, for example, admitted that,

The rap sessions are powerful. Sometimes we get in there and start talking about various things, and next thing you know several hours have gone by. Sometimes guys might have questions but don't feel comfortable talking to Mr. McDonald initially. The upperclassmen are able to offer suggestions for how they could handle the situation.

Moreover, many of the participants reflected on how each workshop brought about synergy amongst the group members. Because everyone was there for a common goal, it was easy to get the men to provide their input and hear input from other participants about any topic under discussion.

Makinley mentioned that his experiences have both challenged him and developed him professionally by giving him opportunities to interact with people who have different belief systems and/or different values than himself. These experiences teach valuable ideals. For example, Makinley recounted an event where he learned about chivalry:

There was actually a workshop on etiquette and stuff to help us know that like chivalry is not dead and stuff like that. Oh yeah it definitely let us know that perspective is everything. Everybody has their own point of view, but you need

to, like, respect others' point of view, and it helps you better understand where they're coming from.

A review of the rap session minutes gave the researcher a unique perspective. In one particular meeting, the participants discussed how the program affords them the opportunity to examine their respective academic majors in a real world context. Through the program, they have opportunities to engage with individuals currently working in the field and to ask realistic questions about the practical applications of the theory they, the young men, are learning in school. Thus, the young men can scrutinize what they hear in the classroom through a critical lens. This exercise ultimately enhances their knowledge capacity. Moreover, many of the interactions have shaped the participants' outlook on the majors they are pursuing. The program exposes them to internship opportunities, co-ops, and undergraduate research experiences. They have become privy to a greater depth and breadth of the possibilities to explore. In addition, the participants can expand their networks and improve their networking skills. Danny tells the story of how one participant benefited from being able to expand his professional network. The participant has participated in many different activities as a result of the program and has been able to present professionally.

There was a young man, who was already an upperclassman by the time I started in the job. He had done wonderful things at BJP and credited the opportunities he was afforded to his participation and exposure in Men Built with Character in some of the activities and events he took part in. As an upperclassman, he gained the respect of his peers. We had him present at our symposium last year. And some of those presentations have sparked other presentations for him. The social networking and the professional networking is closely tied together ... I think Men Built with Character affords its guys these unique opportunities.

During the focus group, Chuck offered another example of how he has been able to use his experience and position with the program to solicit new experience. The confidence he has gained from the program has empowered him to try things completely out of his comfort zone.

For example, during summer school last year, I partnered with a few of my former classmates from the community college to plan a DNC event. I did not take in consideration political affiliations. I just figured the call for help came and I knew from previous conversations that my peers were interested in getting involved in the Presidential campaign since it was coming to our city. A good friend of mine I met while attending the community college hit me up and inquired if I knew anyone interested in working on the President's campaign. I knew this would be an awesome experience. I shared the information with my classmates and to my surprise ... the white folks acted extremely pretentious and the few Middle Eastern students just stuck to themselves and never replied. I was completely shocked that folks weren't interested in helping out on the campaign not because of their political affiliation but rather for this once in a lifetime opportunity as a college student. Although my classmates did not want to expand their network, my brothers jumped on the opportunity and we had a blast.

In Chuck's example, he was able to afford his brothers an opportunity. This might be in part because of the relationships the men had established. They knew that each one had the other person's best interest at heart. Moreover, the program has not only prepared the men for success, but also encouraged them to be more professional. Some of them had never worn a suit in their life, for example; they had no idea how to prepare a dress shirt. Once, right before a career fair, many of the upperclassmen reached back to show the young men how to dress to impress. Chuck gave the following account:

Even though I was a transfer student, I had no clue how to tie ties or bow ties. Therefore, I never wore either. The guys in the program took their time and patiently helped me learn how to dress. A few of us went to Men's Warehouse to get help. I never knew how many variations of dress shirts existed. When you were supposed to wear certain suits over others. [Laugh] The appropriate lengths of suit jackets were even discussed. Mr. C., you know how we do. I love my

people, but we good for wearing our cranberry red or lime green pin stripe suit with the jacket all the way down to our knees with some black patent leather shoes with a gold tip on Easter and think we look real fly. Um ... wrong! but I can't hate on them. If they don't know, like I didn't know ... somebody gotta help them out.

Participants acknowledged that exposure to new experiences and teachable moments pushed them out of their comfort zones. Regardless of how uncomfortable they were in any situation, men within the program as well as with individuals outside the program provide the necessary support to encourage the men to take on the new adventure. Joshua shared a unique story during his individual interview:

Taking part in the program has exposed me to opportunities like as far as financial and I guess kind of networking. You see where I'm from; the idea of going to college is bleak. It's an experience for those people and those people don't look like me. My situation is crazy and stuff. My aunt did damn near everything to ensure I would not fall by the wayside and so, I'm kinda doing this for her and me as well. Maybe a few of my brothers and I can study abroad together. That would be actually pretty tight if you ask me. I would definitely need at least one of my brothers to go with me. Hell, I'm from Jefferson. Coming here was a stretch. I could only imagine going abroad and what that might look like. At least my Aunt would be okay knowing that we're not out there alone.

The program also serves to provide access to different experiences by giving the young men the tools to succeed. The program is a sort of linchpin; participants can take experiences gained through the program and apply it in real world settings. Woody revealed his most rewarding memory during his individual interview at BJP:

Going to the National Society of Black Engineers convention last summer ... not last summer, last spring, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I got into NSBE ... Actually; I got into NSBE through Men Built with Character. I met ... I got into Men Built with Character the week of welcome. They were just standing in front of the Union recruiting people, and that's how I found out about Men Built with Character and we had a little cookout. So I went to the cookout and met all the brothers and one of the brothers was civil engineering major – "Have you ever

heard about NSBE?" "No I haven't." Went to the first NSBE meeting and then boom I was in it. And so, I got into NSBE, groomed it, got a few tutoring lessons from everyone and they found out about the convention. Went to the convention and at the convention I was extremely nervous because it's a thousand other brothers that look exactly like you, have the exact same credentials. Why would I get a job? I sat down, I got all the ... I just remembered all the training that I got from Men Built with Character like I mentioned yesterday about the Men Built with Character rap session and, you know, once I got into the interview I was comfortable because I knew I had the training from BJP that I could use in this interview and fortunately it came back profitable. I got the co-op from Toyota Engineering and Manufacturing for last summer. And so that really is my most rewarding memory because BJP groomed me for that opportunity. Had I not met Brother Allen to review my resume, had I not been in NSBE interviewing tips and stuff like that, I wouldn't have been able to come out prosperous.

During his individual interview, Jerry offered a slightly different perspective on how the program has impacted him thus far. Jerry explained, "[F]or some of us, it opened up job opportunities because Mr. McDonald is like one of the heads in We Soar and so by joining Men Built with Character I heard about We Soar, and I actually managed to get a position."

During Traven's individual interview, he noted that the program has benefited him by "teaching him to take advice"; he has also benefitted from "going to workshops, and learning from other people." He adds, "I'm just very thankful for the programs that they have here." The professional workshops have benefited Joshua a great deal in his preparation to succeed. He noted,

The professional workshops in a sense addressed not only how to dress in our attire and things like that but assisted us in developing resumes and cover letters and interview tips. Things like that, which we're going to use every day. It just ... it takes a lot nowadays to hold a conversation with someone so it takes certain tips from the Men Built with Character rap sessions like trying to limit the amount of time you say 'um.' Sometimes you want to pause and get your thoughts together and then move on. Things that we're going to use the rest of our lives and that are going to get us somewhere is important and most interesting to me.

Throughout this study, evidence informs how the program facilitated academic and social integration for the participants. After a thorough review of the program documents and in-depth conversations with the founder and program coordinator along with the individual interviews, a sound understanding of the program was constructed. Astonishingly, the program was designed in a way to meet the student where he was individually and provide him with intentional interventions to shape his college experience. A variety of experiences were uncovered, which ultimately aided in the participants feeling connected academically and engaged socially.

Key Dimensions

Three key dimensions of an institutional support service program aimed at the retention of Black undergraduate males were found in this study: providing mentorship, being inspirational, and offering academic enrichment. Each dimension plays a major role in creating the holistic experience of the student.

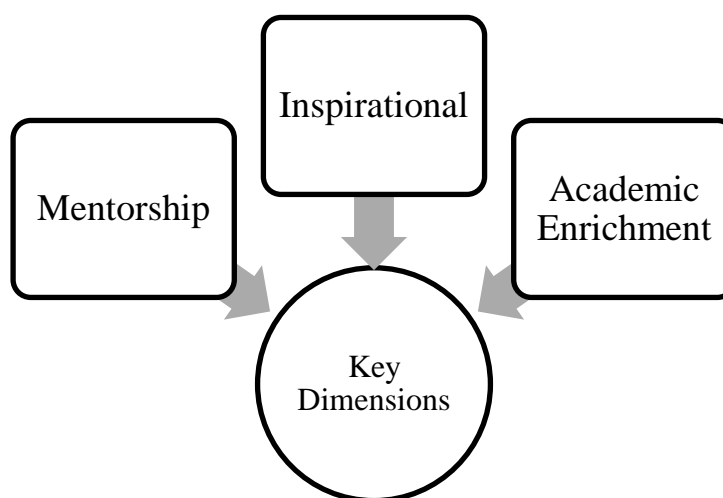


FIGURE 15: Key dimensions

From the survey that was administered, all ten participants agreed that the program was a positive experience for them. Almost all of the participants referenced the fact that the program provided sound academic enrichment. Six out of the ten participants reported agreeing with the notion that the program helped them to become more responsible for their academic success. Men who took part in this program received a wealth of resources to support them in their academic pursuit of their respective degrees. Mentorship, on the other hand, is the foundation upon which the program stands. From peer to peer, to faculty/staff to student, there is a desire to learn from others while at the same time expanding one's own knowledge capacity. The high-caliber men taking part in

this program bring with them a variety of experiences that add flavor to each and every interaction. Lastly, the participants highlighted the fact that this program provides them a certain inspirational aspect that creates a great impact on their lives.

Mentorship

Two basic components created the mentorship experience: a trusting environment and positive influences created through role modeling.

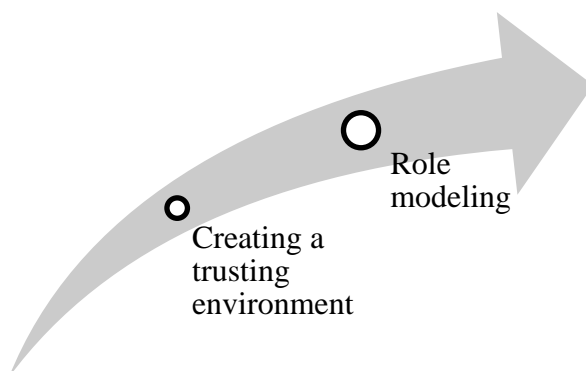


FIGURE 16: Motivation

Going off to college is a major ordeal for students in general. However, specifically exploring the plight of Black males in this study uncovered what unique challenges these participants face. Some cited as a stressor the first time being in a large city far from home. Others recounted attempting to figure out why none of their classmates resembled them racially or ethnically. Black males far away from home as well as ones from the neighboring county are all experiencing culture shock: "Why did I choose to come here? How do I fit in? I am all alone on this huge campus and I just cannot figure out how to get connected." These were just some of the concerns many of the participants remembered feeling. Actually, five out of the ten men in the study admitted to a slight struggle with adjusting to college when they first arrived. In some

instances, these men shared that they experienced isolation. There were many things for them to do on campus; however, so many options became overwhelming at times. In an effort to decrease loneliness and/or isolation, the program's ability to provide solid mentorship became paramount.

Tinto (1993) argues that mentor programs are effective ways of retaining all students and helping them matriculate through their college experience. However, there is something particularly effective about a person of color being mentored by another person of color at a predominantly white institution. Researchers (Fries-Britt, Younger, & Hall, 2010; Robert, Davis, & Dina, 2010; Museus & Liverman, 2010; and Harper, 2009) suggest that it is important for African American males to be exposed and connected with African American males who have been successful in higher education. Therefore, the mentorship provided through the program provides crucial nurturing in helping these African American males overcome their sense of isolation.

Many of the participants used the mentoring opportunities to guide their path at the university. In the individual interview with Woody, he noted that his time at the University was thoroughly shaped by the mentorship he received from the program. He appreciated the fact that the program gives him the opportunity to "meet people that look like me." He went on,

I was in the engineering building my freshman year and so I was one of maybe 20 black guys that were in there and so I didn't get out. Like I said, it took time for my social life to grow. Through Men Built with Character, I went to the cookout to meet other people and then through Men Built with Character meeting NSBE, which are other people that look like me and study the exact same thing I study. It opens doors. It's just from one point to the other. Pick, pick, pick. It got to the point where I'm meeting more and more people and I'm adding to my network. Subconsciously I have this number and then when something comes up, it rings the bell, "Oh, Keith, this is what he does. Maybe I can give him a ring and see if

he can inform me on it." And so it really ... it just opens doors as far as networking is concerned, and especially, like I mentioned Keith earlier, he's off in Chicago now and I can still send him a text every now and then, "How are you doing? What's going on?" I mean, that's a friend I'm going to have for life and that's someone I met my first semester in college. It just really opens that door, especially in this age of technology. You're never going to lose touch. It took me a while to branch out. That's where Men Built with Character came in and through Men Built with Character I'm in NSBE and so, I'm meeting more and more people that look like me. And also I had a great friend, he also happened to be from the Bahamas. He was a junior at the time and I was a freshman so he really helped put me in contact with the right people as well. Once again, my first year I really did class, class/dorm, class/dorm, back and forth but it's definitely grown. As I was able to expand and find people in my major, I'm cool with and then, of course, Men Built with Character and NSBE, it really grew. It definitely grew.

Another characteristic of the program that corresponds to its mentorship dimension is the trusting environment it created. Living in the residence halls was somewhat of a challenge for many of the participants because most of them had never shared a room with another sibling or someone of a different race in his entire life. Their roommates had different beliefs and values. They, the Black men, did not feel as if they had anyone they could run to and be confident the person would understand where they were coming from; so, they stuck to themselves. Men Built with Character seemed to provide a listening ear as the mentors were always there to listen and support them. Taking part in the program became a social outlet for the men to get connected and feel a part of a larger community. During his individual interview, Danny noted that,

Um ... once the men become a part of the program, I do not think they feel isolated anymore in the respects that they do not have somewhere to go. Especially the men who are familiar with our program. I cannot attest to the other men on campus who have not been plugged in because I do realize that that is a sense of ... "Okay... I know where I can come. I'm coming back to see you" ... "I know where you are" ... "I'm coming to find you." Um ... but once they get plugged into the other men on campus and in the program, I think on some level

they feel that they have somewhere to go ... even if they're not fully exercising that ability to go and share.

An analysis of the data revealed that for many of the participants, practitioners within the field of Student Affairs serve the unique role of an extended parent, coach, and friend. Not surprisingly, researchers have proven that African American males who get connected to their institutions are more likely to perform better in their studies and stay more engaged. Terri reminisced about some of the initial conversations that had taken place when the program was under development: "[M]any faculty members and campus partners recognized the issue at hand; however, [they] viewed the situation as a daunting task to reach the young African American men." She went on to note, though, that "the potential relationships that developed help those men find a place within the institution to call home." The relationships that were developed early on between the faculty/staff member and the student took on a unique quality. Trust served as the focal point of the relationship. The distinction between the teacher/faculty member who participated in the program and the student was ever preserved, but each was given the ability to teach the other, thereby further strengthening the relationship.

Providing this outlet for the men to connect and be engaged has proven to be a benefit to those who have come in contact with the program. At times, the work load is intimidating; however, Danny McDonald, who is the program coordinator has mastered the art of using his team to forge ahead. Much of the work that he does could not be done without the support of the upperclassmen in the program. However, it is critical to note that the group does not view mentorship in the traditional sense. Rather than being simply a relationship in which the mentor encourages the mentee to follow or mimic the

footsteps of the mentor in order to become a success, mentorship as it exists in Men Built with Character is a relationship in which the mentor challenges the mentee to create his own definition of success. The mentor exposes the mentee to unique new experiences that provide him with different perspectives to look at life. Danny asserted that the upperclassmen and campus partners were the lifeline of the program; he pointed out that many of the older participants typically become mentors to younger participants in order to provide continued support.

It is important for them to reach back and support the younger guys. So as the program has matured, many of my initial guys since I started working with the program are getting to be juniors and seniors. They are supporting and helping each other through the process. So if I am not available, they communicate together outside the program to ensure they get what they need done.

During the individual interview with Terri, the program founder, she mentioned that when she reflected upon the state of Black males at BJP when the pilot program was initially taking off, she was "slightly skeptical" that the Black males on campus would welcome the work and effort required to establish the program. Nonetheless, after hearing some of the original mentors share their thoughts about the pilot program, she knew that it had the potential. She paused the interview to search her email for a Google Chat conversation she had had with a former student a few years back. The student had written an encouraging message to her:

Terri, you would not believe this. After connecting with my mentor this afternoon, my mind is completely discombobulated. It seemed like a very welcoming exchange to have with someone who may have been in my shoes. Maybe not exactly the size 16, but with a similar experience ... because they were relating to me on a very personal level other than someone else has. I didn't feel so alone any more after sharing with him that I didn't know how I was going to make it here at BJP. It's kinda like he knew what I was going through. And we automatically shared a bond. It's different from going to a counselor who you

have to pay to go to. This is someone who is taking a personal stake in my future and wants to make sure I finish and succeed. I never had this feeling before, isn't this weird?

Surprisingly, many of the participants shared stories similar to this one. The idea that someone could be willing to listen to their unique situation was very humbling for many of the Black males. In a sense, the mentoring relationships pushed them out of their comfort zone because nobody had ever taken the time to walk in their shoes. These stories raise an important question: Could it be possible that many more Black males are yearning for someone to show them that they care? Could such a man be afraid to step up and express his true need for fear that it may make him look like less of a man? Terri emphasizes the importance of fostering mentorships:

I think that mentoring relationship, you can't beat that. If you can truly find someone who truly takes an interest in the student and truly works with them and stays with them throughout the program, I think that is the key to success.

Sometimes, instead of being offered a solution, a student just needs someone to listen and for his voice to be heard. Terri mentions that the ability to connect with a mentor can have such a great impact on the student because of the openness and ability to share what may be going on in the student's everyday life. Mentoring, defined by Terri during her individual interview, noted that

[I]t is the greatest strength of the program. If the student gets one good mentor, whether it's a mentor in their major or just someone who they connect with personally ... whichever one it is ... makes a world of difference. If it is someone they can relate to and feel comfortable to talk to them about anything and everything that they are experiencing as a college student, that they can go to and say this is bothering me or I'm having problems ... can I talk to you, makes this program what it is.

Moreover, as the program coordinator meets with student in a one-on-one setting, trust and confidence are gained because privacy can lead to the student feeling more comfortable and open. Mr. McDonald noted that he is able to mentor the students by imparting wisdom through his shared experiences. Mentoring provides the outlet for so many different kinds of guidance, including academic advising. During his individual interview, Danny articulated a key point:

Before I took this job, I was an academic advisor here at the institution. One of the methods that I use to share my information with the men is that I tell them stories. Whether it is my story or stories of those, I have seen. And I think when they can realize that it is real ... that it is something that okay ... I didn't go through this...but I can see this coming for you or this is what I have seen has happen...whether it is good, bad, or just what it is ... just being aware that it's out there. Know that this is the pitfall you may run into. This is the real deal. I am not going to sugar coat it for you. And then sometime you have to make that decision...there is no right or wrong. And I tell them a lot ... it is like there is no right or wrong answer just know that make the best decision with the information that you have. "If it works, great; if it does not, do not count it as a mistake. Just realize it is a learning experience."

Past notes that others had written previously and that became available to the researcher suggested that role modeling was a huge component of the program. Having someone who looks like them, someone that they can look up to and ask questions, was essential to the men in the program. Role models did not have to share the same cultural background as long as the individual was willing to show he cares. This may be what sets the positive tone for the mentoring relationship. The students come to respect their mentors, which in turn entices the students to want to be a part of the program. Joshua, for example, said that he enjoys being able to relate to someone and have that person encourage him to be his best:

For instance, my homey, Allgood, he always checking in on me saying, "How your grades doing? What you looking like?" and he always challenges me to exceed beyond my bounds. Also, it's the same with a couple of other brothers

around here. So Men Built with Character, I guess with providing great people here on campus that wants to better themselves is always a benefit for when you're trying to challenge yourself academically.

Given the fact that the program is extremely flexible, many of the older members in the program can help out in different ways. Ideally, they have taken the experiences bestowed on them and are applying them in real-world settings. The flexibility allows them to help in different capacities. Makinley provided a perfect example of this. He is unable to attend all of the rap sessions; therefore, he uses his influence to provide mentorship to the young males. That way, he still can take part in the program. In doing this, he realizes the importance of the mentorship component of the program and wants to help pave the way for others by being a role model himself. He went on,

While I enjoy being around the fellas, I don't always have the time. Bruh, I'm in like tons of clubs on campus and thoroughly immersed in my school work. It's funny when I think about it now; I took the lessons taught in Men Built with Character and use them practically every single day while I'm on the grind. Now that I'm an upperclassman, I simply do not have the time to come to all the rap sessions. But I do what I can any time Danny gives me a call. I simply believe that someone paid it forward for me and I have to do the same for the next Black male here on campus. Bruh, early on here at BJP, I took part in We Soar during the summer before my freshmen year. During that experience, the mentorship and seeing other successful black men my age was crazy, it just pushed me to want to be like them and I had something to look at, like a model to know what I wanted to do in life. ... I'm telling you ... mentors and stuff like Danny McDonald, just let me know that it's going to be okay. ... I'm still friends with many of my mentors I got when I took part in We Soar and actually I'm going to be a mentor this summer for that program. Meeting those Black males naturally made me want to do what they were doing.

Danny stated in his individual interview that, through mentoring the Black males, he has learned that "engaging the participants in meaningful conversations is a necessity." Building a rapport with the men goes a long way in most cases. People are willing to go

beyond the call of duty if you show them that you genuinely care about their overall wellbeing. Danny asserted that,

One of the best practices is to meet with the guys one-on-one. They can come in. [T]hey can feel comfortable speaking with me about anything that they feel they need to share with me. I have an open door policy...if I am available or if my door is even cracked...they can come in, they can knock...um...that I have a policy that openly share with them...that once I shut the door, what happens on this side of the door stays on this side of the door. And guys can feel comfortable in sharing. Sometimes things they would not share with their own families. And knowing that I will give them my best assessment. My true feelings, give them a true understanding of what they are experiencing and also letting them know I don't have all of the answers and if I don't have an answer, depending on the circumstance, if they feel comfortable with me picking up the phone and calling across campus, saying hey doc, I got somebody who needs support or someone in a financial predicament and saying, hey, I got someone that needs help. That they know they got an additional support. That someone is looking out for them. Somebody who is going to support them. Um...some of our other best practices are my academic advising background.

As African American males face various challenges, they have the ability to lean back on the experiences they were exposed to through the mentorship gatherings. In essence, through the connections the African American males have made from participating in the program, they have become equipped with the necessary tools to experience college life to its fullest. Not only do they have the connections gained from the mentorship program, they also have the ability to create their own definitions of what success truly is. From the inimitable opportunities granted to them, the African American males in this program were able to determine their own destinies.

Inspiration

The second dimension that emerged in this study was inspiration. Through participation in the program, the participants were given a realistic sense of what they were doing and why instead of just going to college to get a degree.

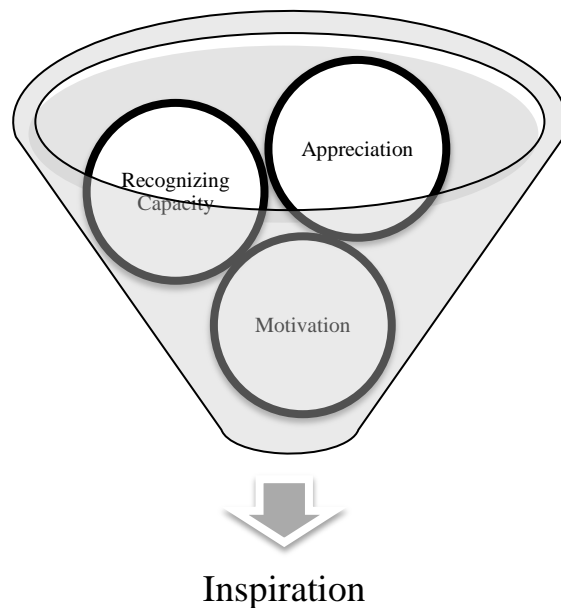


FIGURE 17: Inspiration

Participation in the program gave them something to strive toward. This program created a space in which the participants felt empowered to look back and appreciate the path that had been paved for them. Most of the participants alluded to the fact that this program in some form shaped their cultural awareness, giving them a sense of appreciation for how others had made sacrifices and suffered to make possible where these young men are today. Moreover, the program helped the participants to recognize their present capacity to achieve, succeed, and graduate. The program gave the men opportunities to be engaged with the community both on and off campus. Through this

program, many of the young men referenced the challenge of not seeing many guys that look like them succeed or at least striving to prior to coming to college. The program motivated the men to obtain new experiences in each opportunity bestowed upon them. Having the opportunity to interact frequently with likeminded individuals motivated each of them to do better.

Many of the men confessed an appreciation for the chance to learn more about themselves and the environment in which they grew up, knowledge that provided them additional context for whom they had become. Traven revealed during the focus group that his most rewarding experience through Men Built with Character was the acceptance of his cultural identity by others:

I think a rewarding experience is just how well people accepted me here. You know. And then how I learn from others. 'Cause when I came here my first semester it was partying and whatnot and then now I kind of changed and it's just very rewarding just to see people trying to make a difference on campus and be successful. And I think that's very helpful. That's helped me a lot.

Many of the participants intentionally looked for examples of Black men striving to reach their goals. Some found examples within the program, while others looked to history to find the encouragement to know that they could succeed and achieve whatever they put their minds to. During the focus group, Chris expressed appreciation this way:

It's sad, but our ancestors died fighting the good fight so that we can be where we are today. I can't take it for granted, although I know many of us have. Here is our opportunity to regroup and actually appreciate the struggles folks that came before us experienced.

Through an appreciation of others, the students were able to recognize the plights men that before them had suffered, thus enabling them to understand and reflect upon their own capacity. The participants were able to achieve despite the limiting labels that

had been placed on them. This program has instilled in them the belief that each of them can do so much more than they had previously assumed. Their lives can be positive. They all possess the will-power to go against the grain. Men Built with Character has created a sense of pride in some of the participants, pride that motivates them to explore their own cultural identities and that promotes a feeling that they can do more than what is expected of them and influence others. During the focus group, Chuck recounted that the group

taught me to ... want to look into my African American roots. I mean, I grew up and we never talked about Black folks in history. Therefore, I slightly became naive to believe that our role in developing America wasn't really worthwhile. I know that sounds terrible, but that's just how it is. Being around other Black males striving to succeed makes me so excited. My eyes have been opened and the veil of ignorance has been removed. Nobody gonna have to tell me about my own people. I am going to become a political scientist one day. I want to advocate for young me in college. A few weeks back, I went to the Harvey Gantt Center uptown. Did you know he integrated Clemson University? Damn, Mr. C., you think I could have done something like that. All the odds were stacked up against him just like they are for me now. Well I guess our situations are slightly different. At least I got the program that pushing me to excel. The seed has been planted. My predecessors conducted the first open heart surgery and stuff like that. That is all mind bending for their time so why can't ... it'd be like, I can do something mind bending like that too.

As a result of his experience, Chuck began to question whether, if another great Black man can do such influential things, who is to say he could not achieve such great feats?

Chancellor contends that the program has shown him, too, the capabilities of Black men:

We have a unique potential, which our race has always had. However, we just have to come together and influence each other to go against the grain. We can branch off and still be cool, that cooler pill that everybody is looking for, can be shaped by strong intelligent men. We can get that and start branching out and there's no telling what we could be. And so it's shown me that we can and that there are people like me that want to achieve and so it's shown me that we can do it, that we can come together you know. As I've stated before, I haven't really

been a part of anything like that. It's never really been welcoming and positive so the program really gives me hope.

Chancellor and many of the other participants, on the other hand, failed to realize that they too could do great things. Many of them developed a greater sense of hope after interacting with each other in the program.

It was astonishing to see how personally the men in this study took being a member of the program. The conversations were naturally rich, filled with thick descriptions of each of their experiences. Each of the participants seems to have an intrinsic motivation to view the world differently. The program provides simple examples for the members to step outside their comfort zone to explore the unknown. During his individual interview, Joshua shared his thoughts on this inquiry:

Mr. C., I have been able to learn more about others from different backgrounds and I appreciate them more because the open dialogues we have with each other. I can ask those dumb questions I wouldn't dare ask in the public behind closed doors. I'm learning really about other people and where they came from because there's always somebody whose story is worse than yours or who came from a different part of the world. So culturally, it's been good because you can meet someone from a different background any day of the week. You just gotta put yourself out there. One of my friends in the program is from Nigeria. He and I constantly talk about the difference between our upbringings. I feel like I should study abroad and check his place out. As much as he has told me about the place, I feel as if I am truly missing out.

Many of the participants mentioned seeing certain administrators around campus and being inspired to strive for success in and out of the classroom. A few of them even noted the cultural significance of seeing someone that looks like you in a position of authority. They shared that they recognized the weight put upon those individuals' shoulders but assumed that they must have been okay with it because they signed the dotted line and accepted the position. As Danny explained during his individual

interview, a great advantage of the program lies in the ability of the men to see others who are like them succeed:

On a simplistic level, men of color see another man of color in an administrative position. They realize they have someone that they can confide in. Someone they can reach out to. Someone they may be able to speak to on a candid level that they may not be able to feel comfortable with. Um...whether it is one of their other faculty members. They may find a faculty member they are comfortable with. But I think it is...not to say a female could not serve in this capacity. Being able to see...men who are in an educated scenario...they have a master degree. They may or may not be pursuing their doctorate. There is somebody that I can see who is doing something that...I've had guys come up to me and say I don't...I think I know what I want to do...I want to volunteer, I want to serve the community, but I'm not exactly sure how I want to do it. And then when they go to conferences and they participate in workshops they see other motivational speakers and they say that is it. So they have an opportunity to see professions they get a chance to see other professions in a capacity they may not be exposed to. Some of the other advantages are just being able to travel. There has been a few times where there have been times when we have been able to take guys off campus. And they get away from campus. A lot of times coming to BJP is their first cultural experience away from home. And then this program affords them an opportunity to do a couple other things.

Academic Enrichment

A key dimension of Men Built with Character, in addition to its mentorship and inspiration, is its academic enrichment component. This includes academic advising and the relationships among faculty, staff, and students.

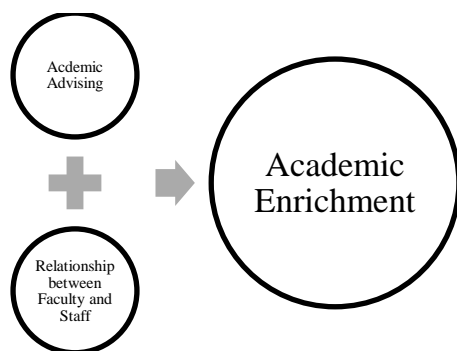


FIGURE 18: Academic enrichment

The basis of this program is to provide the tools necessary for the students to succeed, with academics being one of its main foci. Men who take part in this program receive a wealth of resources to support them in their academic pursuits.

Recognizing that most of the students currently being served by this program are a part of the millennial generation, the men within the study acknowledged at times they look for the immediate yes or no answer in everything. Things are very black and white; there is no gray area. Thus, the men believed that if you challenge them to think critically about the experiences they are afforded with, then they can make the decision on their own and it helps them mature that much more. They take ownership on the lessons they are about to obtain. Whether they make good or bad decisions, and whether their decisions affect them in positive or negative ways, they are still able to take ownership of their decisions and acknowledge that they had made their decisions armed with adequate information. If the situation does not turn out the way they want it to, they can regroup and try again. In the individual interview with Danny, he said that the biggest lesson that he wants the participants to understand is that,

[s]ometimes no is an answer. Sometimes there is no right answer...just make the best decision that you can or if you have made a decision, like you said...just recover as best you can. Um...and learn from it and as you said...it is a bridge builder. I have built a small bridge. I realize my bridge is been small and but I am still trying to make a larger one and expand on it. And then trying to share with them even the path that I'm even going through...professionally as I've said...I've become closure to a few. I give a glimpse of Danny and not Mr. McDonald. I still do not try to become friends with them...I think I am clear in that. I'm saying look...even I'm having this difficulties and I'm still learning this...yes I'm in this position...but I'm still learning that I'm aware that I don't know it all. And what I do not know I am still trying to figure out and I will ask questions. I got people across campus that I still call and say hey, I do not know the answers to everything...but I got quite a few people across campus that I could pick up the phone and ask. And I hope that I'm showing them, it's like you don't have to act

like and even if they may not know the answer...feel comfortable or free enough to say, and Mr. McDonald I got a problem. I do not know what to do...I do not either...but let me call someone and I will get back to you.

Meanwhile, Terri noted during her individual interview that she thinks that the program reaches the goal of graduating students and producing successful professionals.

Well I think, I can think of maybe two students that I know of personally...uh...they graduated...um...one of them is working in the field that he wanted to work in. The other one is in Pharmacy School, which was his plan. So, it did what it was intended to do, ensure students graduated. Make sure this student went into the area they wanted to go into. Or at least they were qualified to go into.

The program's intention of retaining the students until they graduate is reflected in the two students Terri mentioned. The program has several students who fall in this same category. Danny stated that he could see the program's increasing impact on students' academic performances.

Academically, I feel the effect of Men Built with Character has grown wider. Um, I have often had guys come in from a lot of capacities...they come in wanting to change their schedule, their major and do not know how to reach out to a faculty advisor. Students typically have a good handle on where to go in those departments on our campus that has a professional advisor. Now whether or not that person is available is an entirely different conversation. For my Black males, I may just be the closest person to them at that point...so...they come and receive support. I think because there is also an accountability factor where we are checking on them about their grades. Quite a few, if not all are cognizant that someone is watching them. Quite a few guys will come in tell me when they are doing well on their grades as a heads up. They will come in and tell me if they are either doing well...if they are going to get an A or B in the class. I will constantly ask them how everything is going. If I see them on campus...um...but then they'll come and ask for a tutor. They'll come in and ask for some support. And I think just by someone being in this capacity, they feel more open to use this resource. I would have to say that they probably would not ask for help and would struggle and get a C or D in a class if this program was not available. Whereas, I can get up because of my locale...advising is right down the hall. I can walk right down the hall and say hey...this is Jimmie, can you give him a tutor for Calculus 2. I

believe that support affords them the opportunity to do well and even with our workshops. We have study skills, test taking skills...so the guys that come...I've had quite a few tell me that they have used some of the tips. I tell them that they are not going to use all of them. However, if one or two things can help you become more organized or accountable for your studies...the better.

Mr. McDonald, as program coordinator, has a tight grip on the experiences he tries to afford each of the members of the program. With Danny's background in advising, he knows the ins and outs of what each student needs in order to be a success. He understands the intricacies of the University, which may be overlooked by the student. It was evident that the participants knew they had additional support, an extra person looking out for them. A lot of times, depending upon their circumstances, especially once students reach sophomore status, Danny noted,

They are not required to meet with an advisor once they get outside of their freshmen year. They are not required to meet with an advisor until they go on some type of academic probation. Um...typically by that point if they are on probation, it is getting to be too late. They have one or two poor semesters. Our institution has initiated a program called semester warning...where guys or any student who may have had a semester under a 2.0 but their overall cumulative GPA is still over a 2.0. No one is really looking for them. So they can have a strand of two or three poor semesters before any intervention may happen and statistically by that point, the odds of them going on...into suspension are...pretty high...astronomically high.

The students in the program have received all of the efforts put forth by Danny. Many of the participants in the program are underclassmen, but he still has a great way of connecting with upperclassmen as well to ensure they get what they need. Overall, each participant acknowledged that he had benefited a great deal academically from this program. As an upperclassman, Chuck shared this about his academic experience,

I have to say that without the academic support from this program, I know for sure that I wouldn't still be in school. Honestly, Men Built with Character taught

me so much more than how to sign up for classes, it shaped my thoughts about being a husband, a professional, and so many other things. I'll be forever indebted to the guys I met. Our conversations helped other reach our goals.

Helping the men learn how to take ownership of their academic experiences was important. Many of the guys referenced the fact that they now knew what they needed to do in order to achieve. A few of them even mentioned that because so few people believed in them growing up, they lost focus on who was supposed to push them to achieve. However, the program created an environment where they could deconstruct past experiences in order to figure out how to shape their futures. Makinley shared a comment, which was representative of the men within the study as a whole during his individual interview:

I've had a good academic experience at BJP. My academic experience has been pretty good. My grades are solid because I am using those lessons taught from this program. I have around a 3.89 GPA but I would like to do better and college has shown me it's a lot harder than I thought it would be cause I don't know just the amount of work that you have to put in is like way more than high school. And like you are held accountable for everything you do here like you're no longer just under your parents, you're your own person now and you have to go out and make stuff happen yourself. It's funny when I think about it. Everything Mr. McDonald said is coming to pass. It's more of a reason for me to believe everything that he has to say. The man knows what he is talking about. We just have to listen to him. I doubt seriously that he will lead us intentionally down the wrong path. I wish he had a little more help to do his work. Maybe the folks that read this dissertation may feel compelled to take action.

One of the main components of this institutional support program is the interaction between staff and student. Seven out of ten men agreed that the program provided academic assistance when needed. During his individual interview, Danny noted that the program serves as an advising resource and an academic support vehicle. The faculty and staff who volunteer reach out to the participants to provide a wealth of

resources that can assist them in enriching their academic careers as well as their futures.

Danny explained,

I meet with the guys throughout the course of the year. Um...including secondary advising. I serve as a secondary advisor to all the students. Um with BJP, they have a primary advisor assigned to them through the university and their major. I serve as a secondary support network for them, specifically for their academics, financial aid, and any of the peripheral components of the University. I have tailored the program to serve as a network and mentor program through other staff on campus. The team is led by me with the assistance of key professionals, including the University Center for Academic Excellence historically, Counseling Center, Financial Aid, and other academic advisors on campus. Other professionals in the Office of Volunteer and Outreach services also support us and even faculty members support throughout our efforts. We have our rap sessions, which are our monthly meetings. We typically try to hold at least two rap sessions per month with different themes and goals we want to reach out to the guys with from study skills, test taking, financial literacy, personal empowerment, becoming better men. One of the components of the program is to support them not only academically because the ultimate goal is retention and to graduate them but then to also assist them in becoming better men once they leave the university for their families, for their community and for their profession. One of the other component is um...we also hold um...additional workshops outside of academics. Additionally, we have our retreat that we go on. We have our symposium. This is a collection of men coming together for presentations and workshops, and then volunteer outreach on and off campus.

The relationships between the faculty/staff and the student help to cultivate the participants' collegiate experiences. Various partners support the program. As a result of these staff members representing the various campus units, such as financial aid, the counseling center, and academic support, the participants in the program tend to gravitate toward those officials in their respective offices when the participants need help. It is evident that relationships with faculty and staff, both positive and negative, are key to helping a student persist through the collegiate years. Many of the participants stressed the fact that they have had both good and bad relationships with faculty and staff on

campus. From their initial on-campus encounters with faculty and staff, they each remembered their experiences in detail. Chuck viewed his relationships as a win/win situation. He is very purposeful and strategic when interacting with faculty and staff:

I introduce myself to every professor in my department because each of them is working at this university for a reason; they have connections I probably don't have, and I'm trying to be like them one day. They're just a valuable resource that I can one day utilize. Even if I don't, it's good to build a bridge. It's always good to have many connections. You can only have one bridge and if the other side is on fire your doomed. But if you have multiple bridges, you'll be able to get from one point to another.

Jerry, like Chuck, also feels that his relationships, particularly with Danny, have been beneficial. Jerry feels great admiration for Danny and appreciation for his help. He values that Danny is a staff member with whom he can share a bond. He strives to emulate the work ethic and dedication Danny offers the program. Jerry reflects,

Being that I was a transfer from another school in the system, I really don't know too many faculty members but I can speak of one person. I know Mr. McDonald, and he kind of runs Men Built with Character, so he's always been like that...I want to say kind of like a father figure to me. He's very serious, he let me know about opportunities, and he always tried to get me involved. Any time I need to go to his office, I can go to his office about anything, any time so I think he's just a positive guy I can go to. That's probably the faculty...he also helps me out as far as recommendation letters and whatnot so I think he's just always one of those guys I can go to as far as faculty. Other than that, I really don't have too many faculty people that I'm really...that I'm really close with besides schoolwork and whatnot.

Despite these positive reflections, not all experiences with faculty at BJP have been positive; however, when students encounter problems, the group can be a helpful resource. For example, when Woody had a negative experience with a faculty member, Men Built with Character was able to step in and advocate on his behalf. The program often serves as a liaison between the participants and the faculty and staff when the

participants are unable to advocate on their own behalf. During his individual interview, Woody told his personal story of his negative experience with faculty:

In my freshman year I was taking an Earth Science class, and so I had Earth Science class and then I had the lab as well – two totally different teachers – and the Earth Science class I did not...being a freshman, I didn't know the labs had a different exam time than the actual finals so I was going by the common finals schedule online and I ended up missing the final for the lab. And so, I was stressed out. I went and talked to my professor...and he said that he mentioned it in our Monday session. We don't have a Monday session but he held one during the same time that I had another class so I missed that entire session, and missed when he said the final was. I was just going by the common final. I just happened to run into one of the girls in our classes. She's also Black. And she said, "You know what happened? You missed the final." I had no idea and went on to explain the situation to her. So I went to the teacher, explained what happened and he's like, "I'll have to talk to the director." He talked to the director, sent me an email, "No. You can't take it, you can't take it." So, I went to Ms. Thorpe who oversaw the PRODUCE program and she basically fought for me. She explained to him exactly the situation and he didn't budge, and so I found out a little loophole in the story – the same girl that I ran into that told me when the actual final was, she told me that I didn't...I wasn't the only one that missed the final. There was another white guy who missed the final and this guy you can say he always sat in the front, teacher knew who he was. They had that relationship. In the email that the teacher sent me, he said, "I can't let you take this final because you're responsible; you're the only one that missed it." So that's where the two stories don't match up and Ms. Thorpe took over because it got to the point where she said we're going to appeal this. There's a difference from saying, "I was the only one that missed it," but another guy missed it and it just happens to be a white guy that sits in the front. And so, I really just think he didn't want to see me prosper. He...you could just tell from when I went and spoke to him. I think I'm a pretty genuine guy. I went to him and apologized, I accepted responsibility for it, and I just really wanted to take the test because I knew I could pass it with an A. But he just...he saw that as an opportunity to knock me down and I really...I think that's one of the...that's something that really sticks with me and I think it will stick with me for the rest of my life. That's one challenge that I faced. For the first time I've never had someone try to knock me down, especially a White person. I'm coming from the Bahamas where everyone looks the same and everyone's looking out for you. I never had someone blatantly try to defer my dream. So that's really one of the biggest challenges I've had, but fortunately I was able to have Ms. Thorpe in

my corner, Mr. McDonald in my corner in that program to appeal for me and kind of be my voice. Once again, I was still a freshman. Not only am I a freshman, I was an African American male, so odds were against me. But that's where the support programs come in and they're a voice for you.

Ironically, many of the participants shared similar experiences with Faculty and Staff that have influenced their collegiate experience in both positive and negative ways. Some of them felt as if their interaction motivated them to be better, while others' experiences rocked them to the core. The individuals who had poor experiences questioned whether they would be able to persist in their respective majors because of the lack of relationship with the professors. From my observation, one bad experience has the potential to shape the rest of a student's time at BJP. The participants use the program as a refuge, staying connected with the program to ensure they have extra support at any time. Regardless of how life unfolded, the men knew that, in Men Built with Character, they had an additional support system.

Summary

In Chapter Four, an introduction first set the stage for the findings that were to be presented; then, a summary of the interviews and a review of documents was provided. The participants indicated that the program had an impact on their collegiate experiences by providing them with father figures, agents for change, and a sense of community. Men Built with Character facilitates academic and social integration by promoting awareness, resiliency, and growth. The key dimensions of an institutional support service program proved to be providing mentorship, inspiration, and academic enrichment for the participants. The final chapter, Chapter Five, will provide a more in-depth discussion of

the findings, offer implications for future studies, and summarize the overall argument of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary

Because there has not been any substantial increase in the number of Black men in higher education institutions over the past 25 years (Harper, 2005), many institutions have developed support services targeted at improving the retention and matriculation rates of Black males. These institutional support services, which have developed across the landscape of higher education, are designed to promote Black male student success. However, few programs of this nature are designed according to qualitative research on the perceptions of the Black male participants they serve. The present study used a qualitative case study methodology to explore Black males' perceptions of their experiences within a specific institutional support service program at a predominantly white university. The study participants overwhelmingly reiterated a desire for what past literature has shown to be necessary in terms of programming, and the participants offered advice based on their own experiences for how such programming should be shaped in the future. As Kim (2011) indicates, studies like the present one are important because they "help campus leaders, policy makers, and the general public by providing reliable and timely information that can build support for improvement in higher education" (p. 1). This final chapter will draw conclusions from the findings, explain the implications of the findings, and make suggestions for future studies. Three research questions framed the development of themes in this study.

1. How do Men Built with Character participants perceive the program's impact on their collegiate experience?
2. How does the program facilitate academic and social integration for program participants?
3. What are the key dimensions of an Institutional Support Service program aimed at the retention of Black undergraduate males?

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore Black male students' perceptions of the role that institutional support services play in their retention and matriculation. Within an institution of higher education, institutional support programs can provide a wide variety of services to maximize the impact they have on African American males. Based on the results from this study, institutional support services should provide support for the males in various facets of their lives. The program should serve not only as an academic resource but also as psychological and social resources to assist the young men in matriculating through college. The program must not only foster intrinsic motivation in the African American male, but also provide inspiration for them to persist.

Support

Over twenty years ago, Allen's (1987) study found that African American students at PWIs "cry out for supportive environments," and this is still true today (p.30). Institutional support services are one way of developing supportive environments for African American students. Institutional support services have developed across the landscape of higher education with the intended purpose of combating low persistence rates among African American males and others. The importance of community is often

discussed in the literature on African American male student success. However, within this study, there was almost an exaggerated sense of support between the older and younger male students.

While researchers such as Tinto (1975) and Bers and Smith (1991) emphasize the need for institutions to get involved with students as soon as they arrive on campus, this researcher's review of institutional support services across the country revealed that, because of a widespread lack of resources, this goal is not consistently achieved. Availability of resources has a direct impact on an institutional support service's ability to have the desired effect. Many programs have had to cut back on the intentional outreach they offer to Black males who are new to campus simply because of limited staffing and finances.

Tinto's work rightly points out the importance of a student becoming connected early on to ensure successful academic and social integration into the institution; however, his work does not take into consideration the staffing or funding shortages that are critical challenges in any program. Another limitation of his theory is that it does not take into account the potential for staff burnout among those who work with such programs. For example, in the case of Men Built with Character, the program coordinator emphasized the fact that limited resources stifled his ability to make ample, intentional connections with Black males when they were new to campus. Many participants, instead of being encouraged to join the program as a result of outreach efforts made by the director, joined Men Built with Character only after observing other Black males thrive in various leadership opportunities. Seeing these student leaders was what enticed them to get involved. This researcher's critical examination of the program led him to question

the program coordinator's overall job satisfaction (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Given the fact that the program coordinator has a limited staffing structure to support the students, a troubling question emerged: how does he avoid mental/emotional exhaustion? Burnout has the potential to have a deleterious effect on Mr. McDonald. One is concerned about how much the program coordinator can give of himself. He wears multiple hats, as the counselor, mentor, and advisor, among other roles. Thus far, the literature does not adequately address the issue of burnout, nor does it try to measure burnout or job satisfaction among individuals who work in institutional support programs (Brewer & Clippard, 2002).

Institutional support services should support African American males who feel culturally alienated, physically isolated, silenced, and stereotyped by creating a safe haven in which they can express their innermost thoughts. The participants acknowledged that often, with so few Black males on campus, they felt as if their voices were silenced or ignored in the classroom. The racial climate at BJP was complex. The participants said that "everyone knows that racism exist at BJP", and in fact, racism was so commonplace on campus that when it appeared, very few people were even surprised. Here I must frame this discussion with a story from my own perspective.

After wrapping up my last interview, I experienced a mixture of emotions. On one hand, I was super pumped and filled with jubilation that I finally completed all of my interviews, and on the other hand, I was mentally drained. I was literally on information overload from hearing each of the individual stories. Each filled with raw emotions, which shaped their unique experience up to that point in their life. To my surprise, the guys were receptive to the conversation almost immediately and reiterated on a number of occasions they were so glad to be able to share their story with hopes of planting the seed for the next Black male that traversed the campus. Very little warm up was needed before they delved into sharing about their personal experiences.

While I was packing my bag, Jerry inquired if I was going to go see the new

member presentation of the fraternity that I was a part of. My initial thought was no, because I needed some time to debrief everything I had just experienced throughout the day, but then I felt the urge to go simply because the young man asked me and I truly enjoyed being around the brotherhood. Jerry was actually not even a member of the fraternity; however, his sheer excitement changed my mind and gave me a boost of energy. As we headed out of the library towards the Student Center, Jerry and I became immersed in conversation regarding Greek Life on campus. As we walked past the candy stand in the front entrance of the Student Center, a White female called Jerry's name. Jerry looked over startled to figure out who had called his name and immediately caught eyes with the young woman. Upon realizing who it was, he walked over and gave her a hug and they briefly engaged in a conversation. While engaging in the conversation, I stepped back to give them space to speak to one another. However, from where I was positioned, I could see and hear everything they were talking about. Jerry asked her what she was getting into that evening and she responded by saying "ugh...I'm trying to find a safe place to study since all of your Black friends decided to take over the Student Center".

Storytelling is woven into the fabric of critical race theory, and this particular story illustrates the way in which racism can be normalized to the extent that people do not even recognize its existence, making it "difficult to eliminate and address" (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009, p. 390). Appalled by the comment the White woman made, I interjected myself into their conversation and inquired about what she meant by that statement. She looked at Jerry in shock and said, "He is joking right? And Jerry responded, "No, actually. What do you mean by that?" She replied, "You never know what may pop off when a large group of Black people get together; therefore, I am leaving." She said that it was good speaking with him before abruptly dismissing herself from the conversation and walking off. Perplexed by the woman's comment, I was shockingly reminded that racism is "normal, not aberrant, in American society" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Thankfully, in that instance, I was present to support Jerry. It is at times like this when individuals like myself must intercede on behalf of the young Black male to show support in his time of need.

Unfortunately, casual racism is not an uncommon experience at Predominantly White Institutions. Institutional support services can influence others on campus, particularly faculty, staff, and students. As such, these programs should, as Ladson-Billings (1999) suggests, use CRT as a tool to grant access for the marginalized voices to be heard. The programs' facilitation of CRT can impact how faculty, staff, and students engage and interact with Black males.

Another way that institutional support service programs can help students involves Tinto's concept of integration. Tinto explains that relationships can, in the context of integration, be a means of showing support. The relationships formed while engaging with program activities should motivate and inspire the participants to want to do more and be more. Tinto (1999) argues that in order for a student to persist and graduate, he or she must be in a collegiate environment that fosters motivation and learning while communicating high expectations to succeed. However, Tinto does not sufficiently emphasize the key role of relationships for this population. Data from the present study indicates the importance of deep and meaningful relationships, such as that with the father figure, as a means of providing motivation and communicating clear expectations. This affirms the findings of Strayhorn (2008), who posits that supportive relationships contribute to the overall success of African American males in persisting to the degree. Not surprisingly, officials working in institutional support services must be patient, authentic, and focused on the uniqueness of the individual as well as on the more universal concerns that may impact Black males as a group. A one size fits all approach will not work. Furthermore, in order to fully commit to the university, African American males need to feel as though the program staff, as well as faculty and staff at the

university, have their best interests at heart. The model of the father-son relationship, in which the father figure fosters motivation and learning in his "son," is an essential tool for institutional support services. A father knows and cares about the unique needs of each of his children, and he has the ability to exhibit tough love. Because of the trust implied within a father-son relationship, the son feels certain that the father is working in his best interest. This type of relationship assures the student that he belongs and is wanted on campus. Consistent with Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods (2009), a sense of belonging is an essential ingredient in the persistence of African American males. In the present study, integration into the campus environment through the father-figure relationship was found to help participants to develop a sense of belonging and overcome the sense of loneliness they experienced.

Consistent with the literature, this study supports the notion that creating a community of mentors within an institutional support service is critical in supporting Black males at Predominantly White Institutions. Part of mentorship is being able to trust the people around you and having them support you through your struggles and successes. The Men Built with Character program was able to create a trusting environment, wherein the mentorships could flourish both among the peer members and between the students and the program leadership. Men Built with Character helped nurture the peer-to-peer mentoring experience through its rap sessions. While many of the participants noted a lack of trust in people based on their past, the structure of the program alleviated some of their concerns.

The Black males mentioned that mentorship did not always come from a top-down approach. Much of it occurred on a peer-to-peer basis. It could be argued that in

some instances, peer-to-peer mentorship was preferred over interacting with university faculty and staff. This finding corroborates Cuyjet's (2006) stance that peer relationships among African American males are essential if they are to persist to graduation.

Upperclassmen naturally helped guide the underclassmen when they arrived and served as positive role models.

Programs should create an environment wherein the African American men can challenge the machoism that is prevalent in some African American communities. The participants shared how they grew up believing it was uncool or unacceptable to show their raw emotions. They constantly had to present themselves as tough. However, many of them expressed feeling broken on the inside and yearned for the opportunity to release some of the anger they kept inside. The participants noted that the upperclassmen were able to connect with them more quickly than the coordinator was, in part because of the age difference between the coordinator and the participants. Although the coordinator was culturally competent and broadly knowledgeable, the males were effective at connecting with each other and keeping each other current on the ever-changing trends they experienced.

Serves as a Resource

Men Built with Character offered academic advising to the participants in this study, which had an immense impact on their overall performance at BJP. The additional support enabled the men to make more informed decisions. The secondary advising provided by the program ensured that the African American males were enrolling in the right classes for their respective educational tracks. Although students are offered advising within their respective colleges and majors, many of the participants in the

present study mentioned that, as members of Men Built with Character, they felt the need to check in with the program coordinator. The program coordinator was seen as a trusted advisor and father figure who would provide the real deal as it related to their academic pursuits, and the students felt confident that the advice he gave was in their best interests. This type of advising (candid, warm, informal, individualized) is imperative for African American males because of the stereotypes that surround them. For example, the university's general advisor might consciously or unconsciously steer the Black male in a direction that is not in his best interest; by contrast, the peer mentor or program coordinator could be trusted to make additional suggestions to ensure that the Black male would be successful in his pursuit. The advisor gains intimate knowledge of the mentee when a relationship is formed between the mentee and his peers or the advisor. The peers and advisor within the program readily see potential in the individual, which uniquely structures the advising experience. The advisor within the program can give advice that is informed and guided by his extensive knowledge of the Black male and his background; thus, this advisor can take a holistic approach towards advising Black males that is quite effective. Gordon, Habley, and Grites' (2011) work emphasizes another dimension of the study's findings that academic advising should be a tool used in concert with multiple departments on campus. Because many programs lack resources, such cross-campus collaborations are in order to maximize the meeting of student needs. Ideally, the students' experiences in college are fluid, so that no one place within the college environment has the sole responsibility of providing academic advising.

Moreover, through academic advising, for example, program staff are able to establish intentional relationships that enhance the effectiveness of the institutional

support services in critical ways. In many instances, the program staff is able to learn background information that enables them to provide holistic support to the student. By forming relationships with students, the staff is able to hold them accountable in and outside of the classroom. Additionally, on several occasions, the participants reported having staff provide sound advocacy on their behalf, which they appreciated. In some instances, knowing that someone at the institution was willing to go to bat for them was cited as essential to their efforts to succeed.

Quite often, the participants in this study mentioned that they had dealt with subtle instances of racism in the classroom, and they used the program to help them devise a strategy for addressing the issue. Harper and Quayes (2007) claim that institutional support programs are vital in helping Black males cope with challenges such as racism and discrimination from faculty and staff members in and out of the classroom. This is further evidence of one of the core tenets of CRT, namely, that racism is common and pervasive throughout society. Advisors working within an institutional support service program need to understand this fact when supporting Black male students.

This study helps to extend our understanding of best practices for supporting African American male college students: specifically, a holistic approach to support, as taken by the Men Built with Character program. Even their academic advising was not only focused on academics; rather, the participants were also given psychological and social support. The institutional support services exposed Black males to unique experiences they had never encountered before. Several of the participants reported feeling as if the program served as a bridge to connect them to campus resources, thereby assisting them in excelling in and out of the classroom and providing them with many

opportunities to engage leaders around campus, in the community, and within the industries they hoped to enter. Throughout the study, many of the participants reflected on how badly they wanted to succeed. However, for some of them, the prospect of success seemed bleak given the reality they saw every day growing up. A determination was evident in all of the Black men in this study to go against the grain. While some of them may have lacked exposure before participating in the program, they were driven to beat the odds. Their stories are consistent with the findings from Garibaldi's (1992) study, which looked at the plight of Black males in the New Orleans Public School System. Garibaldi found that, regardless of the challenges they faced, if put in the right environment, Black males were willing to do the work in order to excel both within and outside of the classroom. A few participants in this study repeatedly reiterated the fact that they desired early in life for someone to simply give them a chance in the K-12 environment rather than write them off. If we plant the seed early in a child's life, they too can believe that the impossible is obtainable for them. I found myself startled and in disbelief hearing some of the participants reflect upon their previous experiences. Black men do want to succeed, and if they are placed in the right environment and expected to perform, they can meet all the expectations imposed on them.

In addition to support, institutional support services should provide a variety of intentional interventions to help African American male students cope with various challenges they faced prior to coming to college and while in college. Drawing on Sanford's (2006) notion of challenge and support, a concerted effort must be made to meet the participants where they are upon coming to college so that they can be given the appropriate amount of challenge and support. Every experience is a learning opportunity

for all involved. Acknowledging that the participants come to college with a variety of experiences already, the study found that the staff attempted to capitalize on the energy these young men bring with them. The more introverted participants are paired with extroverts to help them step outside of their comfort zones. Through the participants' involvement in the program, many reflected on the determination they developed by taking part in the various activities offered.

By being exposed to various experiences offered by the institutional support services, Black male students' understanding of their situations can be altered for the better. The availability of workshops and resources can provide the participants with updates as well as keep them in the loop on a wide range of campus and current events. Opportunities to teach the participants life skills in order to prepare for their futures can and should be made readily available. Ultimately, the program should provide a number of experiences to the participants, thus enriching their college experiences and encouraging holistic academic and social integration into the university.

Motivation

For Black male undergraduate students who have been victimized by hostility, vulnerability, and stereotypes within the higher education context, it is critically important for institutional support services to be dream nurturers and not dream crushers. Black males have to believe in themselves and possess the internal desire to do what it takes to persist towards graduation. Consistent with Palmer and Young's (2009) research, the presence of intrinsic motivation increases persistence. Opportunities to appreciate the participants' past while staying open to exploring future experiences should be present. The program should affirm the belief that each participant is able to succeed regardless of

low societal expectations. The institutional support program should inspire participants to believe that they can do more than they set out to do, which can ultimately increase their individual capacities and the overall retention rate of Black male students. Affirmation in successful programs comes not only from the program leadership but also from the participants themselves, in short from the community created within the program. The program should entice each participant to push his peers and himself to the limit.

The program challenged its participants to want to do more than the bare minimum. In the present study, African American males were so affected by the program that they tirelessly gave of themselves to get their peers to the point they themselves had reached in their lives. The motivation the Black males possessed within this study is corroborated by Cokley's (2003) assertion that African American students tend to have multiple factors that drive them to succeed. Many of the Black males were motivated by the sense that family and friends were living through them vicariously. The participants' positive experiences with the program challenged them to spread the word and help others. No one took it for granted that someone was willing to offer a helping hand. It made sense when the upperclassmen who had taken part in the study noted a sense of responsibility to pay it forward to the class of men who would come after them. The underclassmen in the study clearly understood the significance behind the baton being passed on to them. Without being told explicitly, one could sense the obligation these young men felt to create the right environment for the next wave of men to join the program. The participants saw with their own eyes the impact the program had on themselves, thus inspiring them to share their stories with other Black males to get them

connected. As a whole, the members of Men Built with Character were eager to perform more than the minimum level of participation in the program.

Within the institutional support service, a consistent discussion regarding academic excellence was at the forefront of all meetings, which led the participants to feel as if the program instilled high expectations for its members. Peer pressure became a motivator that inspired the members to excel in the classroom. Regardless of whether some failed or succeeded, everyone knew that they had to put their best foot forward, and they refused to let their brother down because of lack of effort. A standard of excellence developed; seeing the level of accountability the men placed on each other was remarkable. The standard of excellence created the structure that many of the participants said they needed in order to maintain the necessary focus to persist to the degree. Due to their ability to stay focused academically, their confidence grew. Seeing other Black men walk around campus with their heads held high, learning new tips at each rap session, or applying lessons learned to real world settings bolstered their confidence, which ultimately drove the participants to strive for the highest in everything they did.

In essence, a communal expectation to succeed developed within the brotherhood. The community that was created within this institutional support service established a standard of excellence that each of the men strived to attain. The men developed a communal identity that impacted the support they were offered and the resources granted to them, and gave them the motivation to accomplish their goals.

Future Implications

The following implications suggest possible research to be undertaken in the future. In examining the experiences of Black males attending a predominantly white

institution of higher education, the issue of persistence remains a concern. Conducting a case study on the structure of programs at various institutions can contribute to increasing the number of Black males matriculating towards the degree. A qualitative study on the men who have dropped out of the program and/or the institution can also be informative. Researching both of these areas can provide further insight on how to promote Black males in higher education. There is a need to ensure that men, Black men in particular, are in visible leadership positions and are given opportunities to cultivate relationships with students. This may require intentional efforts on the program's part to seek out and invite such men to be a part of the program.

Because program initiatives already exist at all types of institutions of higher education, a comparative analysis on the structure of these programs would be another valuable project to undertake. Examining the similarities and differences at various institutions can help to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of many programs. The present study explored the perceptions of Black male students of the role played by institutional support services in their retention and matriculation. Qualitative studies examining other minority groups would also be beneficial. With the increased minority presence in higher education, additional factors can be examined to assist administration, faculty, and staff in developing strategies to improve the academic success of all minority students.

Continued research regarding college and university efforts to recruit, retain, and successfully transition African American males into higher education are needed. An evaluation in the form of a campus climate survey or a series of focus group studies could be administered on a bi-annual basis. A summative survey could then be developed, and

the data collected could inform institutional initiatives or become part of a strategic plan for an institution of higher education. The implementation of this research could ensure that new initiatives included input from the students they were meant to serve and appropriately addressed the needs of those African American males attending the university. New research themes could emerge as the landscape of higher education continues to evolve, thus keeping the university on the forefront of larger changes.

One final suggestion for further research was inspired by the one participant in this study who was an international student. The experiences this student had prior to enrolling into college had a profound impact on his experience at BJP, particularly as it relates to his study habits and his desire to seek out new experiences on campus. An examination of differences of ethnicities within those who identify as Black might be a productive vein for future research. This work could offer universities the information they need to construct hands-on opportunities for their students; this work can also help universities to reflect on the efforts they put forth on behalf of Black males and ensure their practices are effective.

This study also has several implications for existing programs. Some of the Black males expressed a feeling that they were not expected to achieve as well as other groups because of their race. Examining faculty expectations can lead to additional strategies in how to deal with the potential challenges that low expectations bring. Previous literature suggests that Black males tend to possess a negative self-perception of their scholastic aptitude as early as elementary school. Thus, another avenue of research could be an exploration of the perceptions that faculty members have of their interactions with Black males and other students of color. Having faculty members examine their own

perceptions, if they can be made to be candid, can illuminate the low expectations that faculty members often have of these students and might contribute to an understanding of why Black males possess a negative self-efficacy concerning their ability to perform in the classroom.

Recommendations

It was obvious to the participants in this study that a lack of institutional support for the Men Built with Character program existed at BJP. One recommendation for the Chancellor's Cabinet would be to provide visible and substantial support for this and other valuable institutional support programs in the future. Administrators should be genuinely committed to the concept of a holistic, culturally responsive institutional support program such as Men Built with Character. Adequate resources, both human and financial, should be allocated for the support of such programs, as one person alone cannot run a comprehensive program of this nature. Given the enrollment trends of BJP, a university committee should be established that can identify, upon their admission, men of color who might be program participants or mentees. The program coordinator or director should work very closely with the university's admissions office and registrar to obtain information related to potential and current program participants.

In conversations with the researcher, the study participants acknowledged the importance of interacting with faculty/staff within the program. As the Men Built with Character continues to expand, another recommendation would be to institute an intentional solicitation process for recruiting mentors who represent a diverse spectrum from all fields and levels of expertise across the university landscape, mentors who are energetic, compassionate, and dedicated. A training program should be developed for

faculty and staff who are selected to serve in the program. Given the current financial crisis faced by institutions of higher education, it is critical that external local community support be solicited for the program. This can be established by marketing the program to community leaders, business affiliates, and educators as a valuable commodity that the community at large will want to sustain and support.

This study found that a systematic evaluation tool does not yet exist to evaluate the status of the program; therefore, a final recommendation would be to have the program coordinator implement a thorough evaluation and assessment of all phases of the program. This is critically important. An evaluation of the program can reveal how each experience offered by the program impacts the participants' overall experiences at the university. An assessment of the program can reveal systematically what is working and which areas need improvement; this evaluation is necessary in order to ensure that student learning and development are at the forefront of every experience. Evaluations should occur after each program and event so that immediate feedback can be obtained; in addition, an assessment of the program as a whole should occur at the end of each academic year. These summative evaluations can help to determine the future direction of the program.

Conclusion

Although there have been many studies investigating the plight of African American males in higher education (Parham & McDavis, 1987; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Cuyjet, 1997; Hrabowski, Maton, & Haniff, 1998; and Jackson & Moore, 2006), as well as literature on this group's difficulty in persisting to graduation (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Ross, 1998; Strayhorn, 2008; Harper, 2012), there is a dearth of information

on the role that institutional support services play in aiding Black males at Predominantly White Institutions. The present researcher, in reviewing earlier literature on the subject, found that many institutions of higher education had been reexamining their efforts at retaining and graduating black males. Intentional interventions have been created across the landscape of higher education to address this specific issue. Notwithstanding the intentional efforts previously explored, this study sought to explore the lived experiences of Black males relative to their involvement in a particular institutional support program.

The goal of increasing the retention of African American males in higher education requires scholars and practitioners alike to move beyond simply observing the phenomena under exploration to understanding successful interventions and assessing their viability as methods for enacting policy changes. We can no longer base decisions on quantitative indicators alone. Time must be spent understanding the qualitative experiences of Black males at Predominantly White Institutions if the most impactful interventions are to be developed. Collective efforts from all stakeholders are necessary in order to reverse the current state of Black males in higher education.

The intent of this study was to explore the perceptions of Black male students of the role played by institutional support services in their retention and matriculation. The study answered the three guiding research questions stated in Chapter One and offered a unique perspective on the role of institutional support services in the retention and matriculation of Black males in higher education.

On the whole, much can be learned from this study. The most poignant message is that we ought to allow the voices of the students themselves to guide the conversation when we are shaping what the future direction will look like for an institutional support

service. Moving forward in our efforts to support the Black male undergraduate student, particularly at predominantly White institutions, it is critical that the voices of the student be considered because the decisions being crafted will have a direct impact on them.

Administrators, policy makers, and various stakeholders must listen to the voices of the Black males in studies such as this one.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____

Email: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Hometown/State: _____

Major: _____

Classification: _____

Parent/Legal Guardian Highest Level of Education (Check the appropriate box):

Mother:

 Less than High School Diploma High School Diploma Some College College Completion Graduate School

Other: _____

Father:

 Less than High School Diploma High School Diploma Some College College Completion Graduate School

Other: _____

Please check the best possible answer.

Background Information	Yes	No
Are you currently enrolled at the University?		
Are you currently enrolled in the "Men Built with Character" program at the University?		
Did you transfer into the University from another postsecondary institution?		

Please answer the question below.

How long have you been in the "Men Built with Character" Program? _____

Circle the appropriate number for each question that comes closest to reflecting your opinion.

	Agree 1	Slightly Agree 2	Neither Agree Nor Disagree 3	Slightly Disagree 4	Disagree 5
The program was a positive experience for me.	1	2	3	4	5
The program helped me to make a successful academic transition to college.	1	2	3	4	5
The program helped me to make a successful social transition to college.	1	2	3	4	5

The program helped me to feel less isolated on campus.	1	2	3	4	5
The program helped me to find academic assistance when I needed it.	1	2	3	4	5
The program helped me to find assistance from the off-campus community when I needed it.	1	2	3	4	5
The program helped me to become more responsible for my academic success.	1	2	3	4	5

Questionnaire Survey (Continued)

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH DESIGN INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

"Welcome and thank you for participating in this individual interview. The purpose of our conversation today is to understand the perceptions of Black male students of the role that institutional support services play in Black male students retention and matriculation at a predominantly white institution (PWI).

First, I would like to stress the importance of confidentiality. I strongly believe that in order for our time together to be a successful discussion, respect for confidentiality is paramount. The information you share will be used solely for the purposes of helping me (the researcher) complete my research. All participants will be de-identified by the assignment of a pseudonym. The pseudonym will be used in the transcripts and all write ups of the data.

I would like to also establish some basic ground rules before we begin. Feel free to ask questions of me for clarification. My hope is that you will feel comfortable participating. Know that there is no right or wrong answers. I only ask that you share from your perspective and help me learn about you. At this time, please put away any cell phones or electronic devices you have for the remaining time we have together.

This interview will be broken up into three parts. During the first part of the interview, I will attempt to put your experience in context by asking you to tell as much as possible about yourself up until the time you became of student at BJP and a member of "Men Built with Character". The second part of the interview will be designed in a way that concentrates on the concrete details of your present experience of being an African American male at a predominantly white institution. Lastly, I will attempt to get you to look back on the factors in your life that got you to your current situation. I want you to answer the questions openly and honestly. Please remember to be relaxed. There are no right or wrong answers.

Now, I will begin the individual interview.

Part 1 of the interview will focus on the participant's life history.

1. Tell me about your childhood?
 - a. Neighborhood? (Probe)
 - b. Influential People in your life? (Probe)
2. How did you learn about college?
 - a. Did parents attend? (Probe)
 - b. Did you follow what your siblings/friends were doing? (Probe)
3. Tell me about your experiences in school prior to attending college?
 - a. Were you involved in extracurricular activities?
 - b. Do you think you were treated differently as a black male?

Part 2 of the interview will focus on the participants' present experience of being an African American male at a PWI:

1. Tell me about your decision to attend college?
2. Describe your experience at BJP.
 - a. What has been your most rewarding memory?
 - b. What has been your greatest challenge?
 - c. How is your academic experience?
 - d. How is your social life?
 - i. What types of programs and/or activities since entering college have you been involved in?
 - e. Have you established a network of friends that you study with? Compare notes?
3. Tell me about your experience with faculty.
4. Do you feel that you are successful? Why or why not?
 - a. Do you feel confident that you will be able to accomplish your educational and career goals thus far?

Part 3 of the interview will focus on the meaning of the participants experiences gained up to that point and reflect on their involvement with "Men Built with Character":

1. Tell me about your experience with Men Built with Character.
2. How has it been beneficial to you?
 - Academically?
 - Socially?
 - Culturally
 - What part of the program has benefited you the most/least?
3. What recommendations would you make for improving this program? Why?
4. Do you think it is important for the university to provide these kinds of institutional support programs?
 - a. If yes: Why do you feel this program is of value?
If no: What if any support should the university provide for Black males?

Closing:

"Before I officially close this session, I would like to ask you if there is anything I overlooked that you would like to add."

"If there are no further thoughts or input, I would like to thank you for taking some of your time to provide insight on your thoughts regarding the perceptions of Black male students of the roles that institutional support services play in Black male students retention and matriculation. As promised, you will receive a \$15 Wal-Mart gift card certificate. With your input, I am hoping to better understand your perceptions of institutional support programs and how institutions can continue to improve their efforts to impact your experience. Thank you again for your time."

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH DESIGN FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Offer Pizza, Drinks, and Drinks!

"Welcome and thank you for participating in my focus group this evening. The purpose of our conversation today is to understand the perceptions of Black male students of the role that institutional support services play in Black male students retention and matriculation at a predominantly white institution (PWI). This group was determined based on your willingness to participate in my study.

First, I would like to stress the importance of confidentiality. We strongly believe that in order for this evening to be a successful discussion for everyone, respect for confidentiality is paramount. The information you share will be used solely for the purposes of helping me (the researcher) complete my research. All participants will be de-identified by the assignment of a pseudonym. The pseudonym will be used in the transcripts and all write ups of the data.

I would like to also establish some basic ground rules before we begin. Please be mindful of others as they are speaking and allow one person to speak at a time. I really hope that you all will engage in discussion among each other, as my main role is to facilitate, but not participate in answering the discussions. Feel free to ask questions of other participants for clarification or to add onto a point someone else has shared. My hope is that everyone will feel comfortable participating equally. Know that there is no right or wrong answers. We only ask that you share from your perspective and help me learn about you. At this time, please put away any cell phones or electronic devices you have for the remaining time we have together.

I am now going to ask a series of questions related to the topic. I want you to answer the questions openly and honestly. Please remember to be respectful of the thoughts and viewpoints of other students in the group."

"Before we get started, I would like to take a few minutes to get to know you all. Can we go around the room and have everyone tell us your name, major, where you live, and your favorite thing about BJP? Please try to keep your answers brief as we will need to move into further questions when we are finished with introduction."

"Thank you! Now, we will begin our focus group questions."

1. In what ways has the "Men Built with Character" Program had an impact on your experience at the University?
2. What did the "Men Built with Character" Program do for you to help with your transition to the University?

3. Do you feel like institutional support programs, such as "Men Built with Character" is important for Black males to have a positive collegiate experience (academically, socially, etc)?
4. If you have transferred to the University, how did the "Men Built with Character" Program help to make the transfer successful?
5. How did the "Men Built with Character" Program orient you to college resources for success?
6. Do you feel that the "Men Built with Character" Program assisted you to become more academically responsible? If yes, how? If not, please provide a reason why not.
7. How do you think the "Men Built with Character" Program has impacted other participants in the program? If you do not think it has, please provide a reason why.
8. How do you think the "Men Built with Character" Program can improve the academic life of the participant on campus? If you do not think it can, please provide a reason why.
9. How do you think the "Men Built with Character" Program can improve the social life of the participant on campus? If you do not think it can, please provide a reason why.
10. Is there anything else that you wish to share about your experience with the "Men Built with Character" Program?

Closing:

"Before I officially close this session, I would like to ask you if there is anything I overlooked that you would like to add."

"If there are no further thoughts or input, I would like to thank you for taking some of your time this evening to provide insight on your thoughts regarding the perceptions of Black male students of the roles that institutional support services play in Black male students retention and matriculation.

If you are interested/willing to participate in the individual interview, which will take place between tonight and Friday, April 5, please sign your name, include your cell phone number, and email address next to a time slot on the sheet of paper I am passing around. As promised, each of you that participate in the individual interview will receive a \$15 Wal-Mart gift card certificate at the completion of your interview. With your input, I am hoping to better understand your perceptions of institutional support programs and how institutions can continue and improve our efforts to impact your experience. Thank you again for your time this evening.

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH DESIGN COORDINATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Advisor: _____

Phone: _____ e-mail: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place from <INSERT DATE> to <INSERT DATE>.

Interview Questions for Coordinator Interview

1. What is your position at the university? How long have you worked with African American students in this particular program? In that period, approximately how many African American students have you worked with?
2. Tell me about the program.
 - a. Components
 - b. Best practices utilized
 - c. Advantages/disadvantages of the program
3. How does the program affect the participant?
 - a. Academically
 - b. Socially
 - c. Cultural experience
4. Describe the profile of the students served through this program.
5. Have you seen a positive correlation between academic success and participation in the program for the African American male students at this university? Please provide an example.
6. How do you measure the success of the program?
7. Is there anything else that you wish to share about your experiences with working with a program specifically designed to work with African American male students?

APPENDIX E: RESEARCH DESIGN PROGRAM FOUNDERS INTERVIEW
PROTOCOL

Program Founder: _____

Phone: _____ e-mail: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place from <INSERT DATE> to <INSERT DATE>.

Interview Questions for Program Founders

1. Describe your previous role in the program?
2. How did you conceive the program/s mission? Objectives?
3. How did you envision the program facilitate the mission, objectives?
4. How would you describe the challenges in developing institutional support programs for Black males at PWIs?
5. What is the impact of the program on the program participants?
 - a. Probe for Specific...academically, socially, culturally
6. What is the greatest strength of the program?
7. What is the greatest weakness of the program?

APPENDIX F: STUDENT PARTICIPANT INFORM CONSENT FORM

**"Participant" Informed Consent for
"Imagining the unthinkable: A case study exploring the perceptions of
African American males who have participated in an institutional support
program"**

You are being asked to participate in a research study, "Imagining the unthinkable: A case study exploring the perceptions of African American males who have participated in an institutional support program." The purpose of this research study is to understand the perceptions of Black male students of the role that institutional support services play in Black male students retention and matriculation. Please read the information carefully. At the end, you will be asked to sign this document if you agree to participate in the study.

The principal investigator for this dissertation is Clyde C. Wilson Jr., a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education Leadership at UNC Charlotte. His faculty advisor is Dr. Lisa Merriweather, and she is in the same department.

You are eligible to participate in this study because you are an undergraduate African American male, between the ages of 18 and 24 attending BJP. You have completed at least one semester in the program, have obtained at least 12 academic credits and have a minimum grade point average of 2.0 (the guidelines of being in good academic standing) at the beginning of the study.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in one focus group interview for 1.5 hours and/or one individual interview for 90-120 minutes, 5 to 6 people are being recruited for the focus group and 10-12 for individual interview. Each interview will be recorded using a digital recorder and focus groups will be recorded using a video recorder. Both interviews will be later transcribed verbatim. You will be provided the opportunity to review your transcript and provide further clarification.

Interview audio/video files and transcripts will be kept under lock and key in two separate locations. Audio/video files will be kept on password protected laptop and will be saved in a password protected folder. Transcripts will be kept on password protected external hard drive. After the completion of the dissertation, the audio/video files will kept for ten years. Any follow-up questions will be sent via e-mail or a follow-up phone call. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality.

All interviews will be conducted at a place where the participant feels most comfortable. All names in the data set including participants' names will be changed to pseudonyms. Therefore, both transcripts and written reports from this research will NOT contain any identifiable information.

There is no foreseen risk in this study. However, there can be some uncomfortable feelings on the part of the interviewed participants because some interview questions might shed light on previous experiences they may have faced as African American male student (e.g., people's stereotypes) at BJP. The researcher will try to make the questions as open and tactful as possible. Additionally, the researcher will provide the number to the counseling center in the event the participant needs an opportunity to debrief their experience.

The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once, you have started.

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. All identifiers will be redacted during transcription so the transcript will not contain identifiers. All names will be replaced with pseudonyms at the time of interview audio/video digital file transcription to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Interview audio/video files and transcripts will be kept under lock and key. Interview audio/video digital files will be deleted after one year after the completion of the study. The results from this dissertation may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, participant's identity will not be disclosed.

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual dissertation, contact Dr. Lisa Merriweather (704-687-8740, lmerriwe@uncc.edu)

Approval Date

This form was approved for use on <INSERT DATE> for use for one year.

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after I and the principal investigator of this research study have signed it.

Participant Name (PRINT)

DATE

Participant Signature

Principal Investigator Signature

DATE

APPENDIX G: NON STUDENT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**"Program Coordinator/Founders" Informed Consent for
"Imagining the unthinkable: A case study exploring the perceptions of
African American males who have participated in an institutional support
program"**

You are being asked to participate in a research study, "Imagining the unthinkable: A case study exploring the perceptions of African American males who have participated in an institutional support program." The purpose of this research study is to understand the perceptions of Black male students of the role that institutional support services play in Black male students retention and matriculation at BJP. Please read the information carefully. At the end, you will be asked to sign this document if you agree to participate in the study.

The principal investigator for this dissertation is Clyde C. Wilson Jr., a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education Leadership at UNC Charlotte. His faculty advisor is Dr. Lisa Merriweather and she is in the same department.

You are eligible to participate in this study because of your leadership involvement with Men Built with Character.

You will be asked to complete one individual interview for 45-60 minutes. Each interview will be recorded using a digital recorder and will be later transcribed verbatim. You will be provided the opportunity to review your transcript and provide further clarification.

Interview audio files and transcripts will be kept under lock and key. Audio/video files will be kept on password protected laptop and will be saved in a password protected folder. Transcripts will be kept on password protected external hard drive. After the completion of the dissertation, the audio files will kept for ten years. Any follow-up questions will be sent via e-mail or a follow-up phone call. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality.

All interviews will be conducted at a place where the participant feels most comfortable. All names in the data set including participants' names will be changed to pseudonyms. Therefore, both transcripts and written reports from this research will NOT contain any identifiable information.

There is no foreseen risk in this study. However, there can be some uncomfortable feelings on the part of the interviewed participants because some interview questions might shed light on previous experiences of African American male student (e.g., people's stereotypes) at BJP. The researcher will try to make the questions as open and tactful as possible. Additionally, the researcher will provide the number to the counseling center in the event the participant needs an opportunity to debrief their experience.

The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once, you have started.

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. All identifiers will be redacted during transcription so the transcript will not contain identifiers. All names will be replaced with pseudonyms at the time of interview audio file transcription to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Interview audio files and transcripts will be kept under lock and key. Interview audio files will be deleted after one year after the completion of the study. The results from this dissertation may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, participant's identity will not be disclosed.

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual dissertation, contact Dr. Lisa Merriweather (704-687-8740, lmerriwe@uncc.edu)

Approval Date

This form was approved for use on <INSERT DATE> for use for one year.

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after I and the principal investigator of this research study have signed it.

Participant Name (PRINT) DATE

Participant Signature

Principal Investigator Signature DATE

APPENDIX H: REQUEST TO MEET LETTER TO PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Re: SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear <insert Coordinator name>:

Thank you for agreeing to partake in my current research study. As per our previous conversation, I am conducting a qualitative research case study on the Build Better Brothers Program. My goal is to understand the perceptions of Black male students of the role that institutional support services play in Black male students retention and matriculation.

I am especially interested in talking with you about the program. Would it be possible to set up a 45 minute face to face interview with you sometime during <insert date/month>? If so, please provide me with three available dates and times via email that work best for you. My email is cwilso96@uncc.edu. I will confirm upon receipt and include that date on the consent form. I would greatly appreciate any information you are able to provide about the Program. Please see enclosed consent form. I will return a fully signed copy for your records. Thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Clyde C. Wilson Jr.
Doctoral Candidate
Principal Investigator
Email: cwilso96@uncc.edu
Phone: 336-253-2793

W/attachment

APPENDIX I: LETTER OF INVITATION TO PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Re: SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear <Insert Advisor Name>:

I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Leadership Program in the College of Education at UNC Charlotte. I am conducting research to understand the perceptions of Black male students of the role that institutional support services play in Black male students retention and matriculation.

I am especially interested in talking with you about Men Built with Character. I believe that your participation will be invaluable to the purpose of this study because of the integral role you play in the facilitation of the program.

Would it be possible for me to set up a 45-60 minute face-to-face interview with you sometime during <Insert Time>? If so, please provide me with three available dates and times via email that work best for you. My email is cwilso96@uncc.edu. I would greatly appreciate any perspective you are able to provide about the Program. Upon hearing from you, I will follow up with an informed consent form and confirmation of the selected meeting date/time. Thank you for your time and attention!

Sincerely,

Clyde C. Wilson Jr.
Doctoral Candidate
Principal Investigator
Email: cwilso96@uncc.edu
Phone: 336-253-2793

APPENDIX J: LETTER OF INVITATION TO STUDENT PARTICIPANT FOR
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

Re: SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear <Insert student name>:

Thank you for your interest in potentially participating in my research study. I am a 4th year Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Leadership Program in the College of Education at UNC Charlotte. Your name was given to me by <INSERT Coordinator Name> for the purpose of a qualitative research study I am in the process of conducting.

In an effort to understand your experience, I am conducting a focus group with participants of the program. Would you be willing to meet for 1.5 hours with 5-6 of your program participants and me to discuss your perception of the Men Built with Character program following a program meeting? I am interested in your honest account of your experience. Please be assured that everything you say will remain confidential including your participation in the focus group. Lite refreshments will be served. I believe that your participation will be invaluable to the purpose of this study.

Please reply to this e-mail message, and check the appropriate boxes below. Please see enclosed consent form. I will return a fully signed copy for your records. I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Clyde C. Wilson Jr.
Doctoral Candidate
Principal Investigator
Email: cwilso96@uncc.edu
Phone: 336-253-2793

____ I would like to participate in the focus group. I am able to meet at any one of the following times: (Please check as many as are convenient. I will schedule a meeting at one of your preferred times.)

___ <Insert time, Date>

____ I do not wish to participate in the focus group.

W/attachment

APPENDIX K: EMAIL INVITATION TO PROGRAM FOUNDERS

Re: SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear <Insert Founder Name>:

I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Leadership Program in the College of Education at UNC Charlotte. I am conducting research to understand the perceptions of Black male students of the role that institutional support services play in Black male students retention and matriculation.

I am especially interested in talking with you about Men Built with Character. I believe that your participation will be invaluable to the purpose of this study because of the integral role you play in the facilitation of the program.

Would it be possible for me to set up a 45-60 minute face-to-face interview with you sometime during <Insert Time>? If so, please provide me with three available dates and times via email that work best for you. My email is cwilso96@uncc.edu. I would greatly appreciate any perspective you are able to provide about the Program. Upon hearing from you, I will follow up with an informed consent form and confirmation of the selected meeting date/time. Thank you for your time and attention!

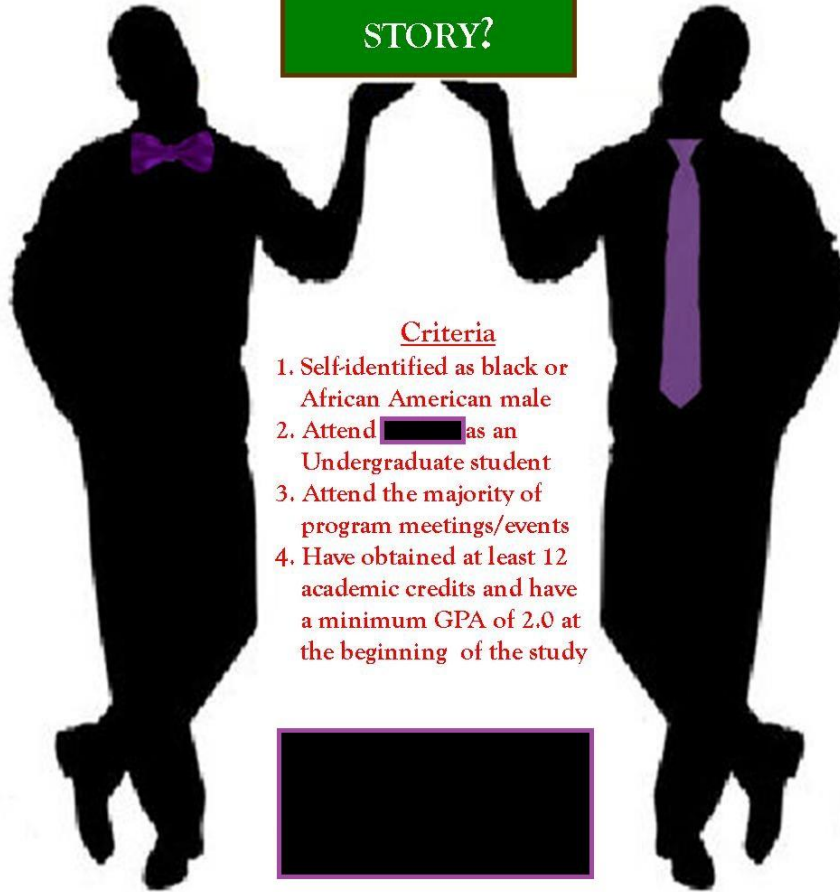
Sincerely,

Clyde C. Wilson Jr.
Doctoral Candidate
Principal Investigator
Email: cwilso96@uncc.edu
Phone: 336-253-2793

APPENDIX L: RECRUITMENT FLYER

MAN TO MAN

WHAT'S YOUR
STORY?



Criteria

1. Self-identified as black or African American male
2. Attend [redacted] as an Undergraduate student
3. Attend the majority of program meetings/events
4. Have obtained at least 12 academic credits and have a minimum GPA of 2.0 at the beginning of the study

I'M LOOKING FOR A FEW BROTHERS TO PARTICIPATE IN A
STUDY DESIGNED TO BETTER UNDERSTAND YOUR PERCEPTION OF
INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Contact Mr. Clyde, MAN TO MAN
336.253.2793 or cwilso96@[redacted].edu

VITA

Clyde C. Wilson Jr., a student affairs professional, is currently working for North Carolina State University's University Housing department as the Assistant Director for West Campus Housing. He has a Bachelors of Science in Recreation Administration from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and a Master of Arts in International Studies with a specialization in International Tourism Development from North Carolina State University. He will earn his Doctor of Education degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, focusing on higher education administration. His research interests include Black male college access and achievement, retention of women of color in STEM, and living learning communities within college housing. Clyde has served as an executive board member of the North Carolina Housing Officers (NCHO), and has served on the program committee for the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO). He is extremely outgoing and enjoys traveling, volunteering, and learning about new things.