

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITY GRADUATES
TRANSITIONING TO PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS FOR GRADUATE
SCHOOL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Jessica T. Maxwell

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of recent Black, Historically Black Colleges and University graduates who chose to transition to a PWI for graduate school. The theory guiding this study was the self-determination theory of motivation developed by psychologists Ryan and Deci. This theory explains how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness impacts human functioning and decisions. This theory was used to determine what motivational factors influenced Black, HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school. The research design was a phenomenological approach exploring the perceptions of a group of Black students lived experiences within an HBCU that motivated them transition to a PWI for graduate school. The participants graduated from one of the 101 HBCUs and transitioned to a PWI for a graduate degree. The study focused on 10 Black, graduate students currently attending a PWI or recently graduate a PWI for graduate school. Semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and graduate student video of advice to undergraduate HBCU students was implemented to gain the perspectives from the HBCU graduates. Data analysis identified three major themes: institutional offerings, programmatic academic offerings, and social relationships and interactions.

Keywords: Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Black students, graduate school, higher education, alma mater, Predominantly White Institutions

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Dedication

To my husband and greatest supporter, Joshua, I dedicate this dissertation to you. It is because of your support and seen and unseen sacrifices that I have been able to accomplish this without any added stress. Thank you for loving me and picking up the ball whenever I dropped it.

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I give glory to God for putting the desire within me to return to higher education for this degree and for being my strength when I was at my weakest. It is God who allowed this vision to manifest. and praise to my heavenly Father who is a constant source of strength and support in my life. To my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Sherrita Rogers, from the first conversation, you validated my research interests and made me feel confident even when I was not. You gave me a “yes” to be my chair and that took so much weight off of me during the season of trying to find a chair. In addition, it is because of you that I have had the honor of having Dr. Cindi Spaulding as my committee member. I am so grateful for the support and expertise throughout this process. To Dr. Cindi Spaulding, you added extra value to my team and did not hesitate to share your wisdom and expertise with me. I am truly honored and grateful to have had you both such a force of guidance and leadership. I am truly blessed you both said “yes” as I literally could not have completed this without either of you.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication.....	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
Table of Contents.....	7
List of Tables.....	11
List of Abbreviations.....	12
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	13
Overview.....	13
Background.....	14
Historical Context.....	14
Social Context.....	15
Theoretical Context.....	16
Problem Statement.....	18
Purpose Statement.....	19
Significance of the Study.....	19
Research Questions.....	23
Central Research Question.....	23
Sub-Question One.....	23
Sub-Question Two.....	23
Definitions.....	23
Summary.....	24

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	25
Theoretical Frameworks	25
Summary	54
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	55
Overview	55
Research Design.....	55
Research Questions	57
Central Research Question.....	57
Sub-Question One.....	57
Sub-Question Two	57
Setting and Participants.....	57
Setting	57
Participants.....	58
Researcher Positionality.....	58
Interpretive Framework	58
Philosophical Assumptions	59
Permissions	63
Focus Group Data Collection Approach.....	65
Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach	68
Data Synthesis.....	73
Trustworthiness.....	74
Credibility	74
Transferability.....	76

Dependability	76
Confirmability	77
Ethical Considerations	77
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	80
Overview	80
Participants	80
Results	84
Institutional Offerings	86
Research Question Responses	94
Central Research Question	94
Sub-Question One	97
Sub-Question Two	98
Summary	99
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	100
Overview	100
Discussion	100
Interpretation of Findings	100
Implications for Policy or Practice	104
Theoretical and Empirical Implications	106
Delimitations and Limitations	109
Recommendations for Future Research	110
Conclusion	111
References	112

Appendix A.....	133
Appendix B.....	135
Appendix C.....	136
Appendix D.....	139
Appendix E.....	140
Appendix F.....	142
Appendix G.....	143
Appendix H.....	147
Appendix I.....	149
Appendix J.....	151

List of Tables

Table 1. Student Participants	81
Table 2. Major Themes and Sub-themes.....	85

List of Abbreviations

Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT)

Causality Orientations Theory (COT)

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET)

First-Generation College Student (FGCS)

Goal Contents Theory (GCT)

Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Organismic Integration Theory (OIT)

Predominantly White Institution (PWI)

Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

United Negro College Fund (UNCF)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Since the middle of the 19th century, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been a major part of American higher education (Perna, 2001). HBCUs were established for the promotion of educating the Black population; however, many students choose to leave their HBCU alma maters to obtain graduate degrees at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Barnett et al., 2016; Crewe, 2017). Graduate degrees are defined as a degree beyond a bachelor's degree, such as a master's (Kelly, 2022). Towards the late 20th century, Black college enrollment shifted away from HBCUs to PWIs (Gasman et al., 2010; Johnson, 2019). Black student enrollment at HBCUs shifted from 18% in 1976 to 8% in 2014 (NCES, n.d.). In the academic year of 2019 to 2020, HBCUs produced 14% of master's degrees and 6% doctoral degrees; however, over time the percentages of Black students obtaining master's and doctoral degrees from HBCUs has continued to decrease (NCES, n.d.).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of recent Black, HBCU graduates who chose to transition to a PWI for graduate school. To investigate this issue, the perceptions of Black, graduate student intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for leaving HBCUs and attending PWIs was explored. According to UNCF (2022), a decrease in Black student enrollment at HBCUs can ultimately affect economic growth on and off campus. Due to a decline in Black graduate student enrollment, the economy can experience a decline in the billions of dollars generated by HBCUs on an annual basis (UNCF, 2022). Unfortunately, minimal to no research has been conducted on the issue of HBCU undergraduate, Black students graduating and transitioning to PWIs for graduate school and the possible impacts of these students not attending HBCUs for graduate school. With that, researching this topic offered

HBCUs valuable information as to why Black students leave their alma maters to attend PWIs offering the same graduate degrees. The findings function as a needs assessment for finding HBCU gaps and offer insight towards how to better serve Black students at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Chapter One presents the background, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of study, research questions, and relevant definitions.

Background

Despite the historic denial of Black education and it not being easily accessible within the United States, HBCUs have successfully produced Black graduates with master's and doctoral degrees. Historically, Blacks were denied admissions to Predominantly White Institutions, resulting in them seeking alternative avenues for education (Williams, 2022). To understand the desire to transition to HBCU graduate programs or non-HBCUs after graduating with undergraduate degrees, it is important to understand the history of HBCUs. This background section provides relevant literature on the historical context of HBCUs in the United States. This section also highlights the social context including the problem and barriers pertaining to Black, undergraduate graduates leaving their alma maters for PWI graduate programs. Lastly, the theoretical context of this study is explored.

Historical Context

After the end of slavery in 1865, most colleges and universities in the United States prohibited Blacks from enrolling (Freemark, 2015; Shadoval-Palis et al., 2020). Prior to the Civil War, there were no structured higher education systems provided for Black students resulting in Blacks being barred from education (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). During this time, most Southern states prohibited Blacks from enrolling in any type of college and schooling, while Northern states discouraged it (HBCU First, 2022). After the Civil War, several Southern

states established HBCUs rather than integrating public institutions (Freemark, 2015; Williams, 2022). This emergence allowed Blacks full access to the most basic human right -- education (Freemark, 2015; HBCU First, 2022).

Additionally, the Second Morrill Act in 1890 was established to support higher education for Black students by requiring states with racially segregated public systems to provide a land-grant for colleges for Black students (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). As a result of the Second Morrill Act in 1890, new Black public institutions were founded, and some private Black institutions transitioned under public control (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Eventually, 16 Black institutions were designated as land-grant colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). The establishment of HBCUs was a major benefit for Blacks, as they initially existed, solely for Black students with minimal to no opportunities to attend PWIs (Banks et al., 2018; Williams, 2022). As the years progressed, HBCUs continued to be established and by the 1930s, there were 121 four-year HBCUs within the U.S. (Hunt, 2021). This study explored the perceptions of Black, graduate students who attended HBCUs for undergrad and transitioned to PWIs for their graduate studies.

Social Context

Today many students who choose to attend HBCUs for their undergraduate experiences do not often transition to their alma maters for graduate school (Johnson, 2019). Students often leave to attend other institutions including PWIs, rather than remaining within the same university for continuing their educational endeavors (Devost, 2022). Efforts to determine the issues of HBCUs have been examined. An obvious difference between HBCUs and PWIs is race; however, the day-to-day interactions between professors, administrators, staff, and students is what sets each apart from the other (Bonsell, 2018).

The Center for Education (2022) implemented a study examining the social impact of Black students who attended HBCUs in comparison to those who attended non-HBCUs. The study used an HBCU alumni and current student self-reported outcomes revealing four common themes amongst the students (Center for Education, 2022). The findings revealed the social impact of students who chose to attend a HBCU and those who chose a PWI. Black students who graduated from HBCUs had a stronger social impact within the community and higher rates of engaging in community support to help develop their careers than those who chose non-HBCUs (Center for Education, 2022). Black students attending HBCUs impacts society of the same race by experiencing lower rates of racism, exploration of cultural roots (Hunt, 2021). Black students attending PWIs impact society by being more actively engaged in career development activities than non-HBCUs (Center for Education, 2022). Furthermore, students who choose HBCUs are less likely to prosper within society in comparison to their non-HBCU peers (Center for Education, 2022). HBCU undergraduate and graduate programs will benefit from this study by using the data found to address any social barriers identified as to why Black students are choosing not to remain within the institution for graduate degrees.

Theoretical Context

Using the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of motivation, founded by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of what causes Black students to transition to PWIs after attending an HBCU for their undergraduate degrees was investigated (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT is a relatively, less-studied motivational theory in retention literature (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Intrinsic motivation may encourage students to willingly seek the best opportunities for themselves which can be based on their experiences (Gutierrez-Serrano et al., 2022). SDT has been found useful in explaining the variation in students' learning strategies, performance,

and persistence (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). The theory uses an important distinction to determine if behaviors are intentional or motivated (Martin, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

There is little to no research conducted on what motivates HBCU undergraduate students to return to the same institution for their graduate degrees and why Black, undergraduate students choose to transition to PWIs for graduate school. Several studies using SDT have focused on HBCUs in comparison to PWIs, but it is unclear if intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of White students have the same type of self-determining outcomes as those of Black populations (Martin, 2012). SDT was used as a framework to aid in understanding college students' academic motivation (Martin, 2012). In conjunction with SDT, the researcher used the Academic Motivational Scale to measure intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for college students (Martin, 2012). Martin (2012) found a strong correlation between Black student GPA and motivation. White students reported the highest levels of intrinsic motivation, while Black students reported different levels of extrinsic motivation (Martin, 2012). Previous research focused on if attending a PWI or an HBCU as Black individuals had higher stress and anxiety over the other (Mitchell, 2018). The studies found that Black students had lower levels of stress while attending HBCUs than at PWIs (Mitchell, 2018). Findings from another study indicated Black students attending an HBCU are more likely to experience academic growth and have higher levels of self-concept and self-determination (Tani & Ray, 2018). These findings exemplify a positive outlook of HBCUs transitioning to the same institution for graduate degrees. This present study aided in closing the gap in literature regarding the intrinsic and/or extrinsic factors that motivate Black, HBCU undergraduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school.

Problem Statement

The problem is many Black students are choosing PWIs over their HBCU undergrad institutions for graduate school. Many students often leave their alma maters to attend other institutions including PWIs for graduate programs. Historically Black Colleges and Universities make up an estimated 3% of all nonprofit colleges with 101 HBCUs within the U.S. (Banks et al., 2018; Williams, 2022). Before higher education was desegregated in the 1950s and 60s, almost all Black college students enrolled at HBCUs (Freemark, 2015). Today, these universities are not often seen as the first choice for students, including Blacks (Johnson et al., 2017). According to Johnson et al. (2017), only 9% of Black students chose to attend an HBCU in 2015. In 2019 and 2020, the percentages of master's degrees awarded to Black HBCU students decreased to 5% (NCES, n.d.). Moreover, the problem is that many Black students who graduate with an undergraduate degree do not return for graduate degrees at their HBCU alma mater resulting in continued declination of HBCU enrollment. Furthermore, decreased enrollment leads to decreased federal and state funding for HBCUs (Dickler, 2022).

HBCUs are already at a disadvantage receiving lower federal and state funding compared to their counterparts (Brooks, 2021). As many Black, undergraduate students choose not to attend their HBCU alma mater for graduate school, the amount of federal and state funding being awarded to HBCUs will continue to decline (Dickler, 2022). Deep cuts in federal and state funding for higher education results in students being responsible for more costs and increased tuition rates (Dickler, 2022). In addition, without federal and state funding, the future of HBCUs and their ability to offer robust programs will diminish (Dickler, 2022). According to Dickler (2022), the national trend of declining enrollment has resulted in a long-term erosion in the operation of the universities. Losing federal and state funding due to declined enrollment may

also result in HBCUs letting go some faculty and staff employees to aid them to stay afloat (Dickler, 2022).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of Black HBCU graduates who chose to transition to a PWI for graduate school. At this stage in the research, the perceptions of the graduate students were generally defined as their thoughts based on their experience. Guided by the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the study explored what motivated recent HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs from their HBCU alma mater. Investigating the motivations of graduate students and what caused them to transition from their HBCU alma mater to a PWI for graduate school, offered stakeholders in Black academic institutions insight into what internal changes can be made to increase retainment and promotion of Black students in HBCU graduate programs. In addition, the findings also brought awareness to the benefits of a PWI for Black students.

Significance of the Study

HBCUs consistently outperform non-HBCUs in the areas of affordability, student experience, and after college preparedness while also providing supportive environments for students (HBCU First, 2021; Widener, 2020). Despite the benefits of HBCUs, they face a myriad of challenges such as funding issues, overworked faculty, and a lack of administrative support with the necessary equipment (Widener, 2020). Historically Black Colleges and Universities are also perceived as insufficient by PWIs (Lake, 2021). These challenges, amongst others, have the potential of impeding the desires and motivations of Black, undergraduate students from returning for graduate opportunities. Theoretically, this research study explored the Theory of Self-Determination and the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that shape the decisions of Black

graduates from HBCUs. Researching what intrinsically and/or extrinsically influenced this population to transition to PWIs for graduate school enhanced current literature, assist stakeholders in HBCUs to make the necessary changes to better their institution, and assist students with choosing graduate schools based on other experiences.

Theoretical

Various researchers have used Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory of motivation when studying higher education institutions and HBCUs, but none focused on HBCU graduates and their motivations to transition to PWIs for graduate school. Researchers have used the SDT to focus on the role of mindfulness as foundation for autonomous regulation of behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theoretical significance of the study using the Self-Determination Theory of motivation contributes to the foundation of the problem of why Black students choose to leave their alma maters to attend PWIs for graduate school, rather than remain within the institution. The Self-Determination Theory assumes that the foundation of self-motivation and determination is based upon the three psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). These needs aid in determining what has intrinsically and/or extrinsically influenced students to leave their HBCU alma maters for PWI graduate level programs.

Gutierrez-Serrano et al. (2022), explored Latina first-generation students' perspectives of their college experiences using the self-determination theory. The authors' goal was to examine what motivates that influence students' academic success and their persistence to attain their degree (Gutierrez-Serrano et al., 2022). Ultimately, this study showed that using the self-determination theory determined that students need satisfying environments to support their small set of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Gutierrez-

Serrano et al., 2022). Students choosing to leave their HBCU alma mater institutions based on their perceived motivations aid in bringing awareness to the theoretical significance of the problem by offering insight on how HBCUs can retain undergraduate students for continued education.

Empirical

Studying the perceptions of Black, undergraduate students and what motivates them to leave their alma mater and furthering their education with a PWI was also empirically significant for HBCUs and PWIs. Research has been conducted on HBCUs versus PWIs, HBCU hardships, first-time college students, and HBCU and PWI success (Johnson, 2019; Van Camp et al., 2010). In addition, researchers have examined why students both Black and White have chosen to either attend an HBCU and/or PWI over the other (Goings, 2016; Mwangi et al., 2018). Furthermore, studies have highlighted why PWIs may be seen as better than HBCUs and why HBCUs may be better for Black students (Anderson, 2017; Johnson, 2019).

There is limited research on why Black, undergraduate students do not return to their HBCU alma maters after graduating with their undergraduate degrees and why they choose to transition to PWIs for graduate school. Why students may choose to not return to their alma mater and why students choose to transition to PWIs after graduation requires research to understand and gain insight to allow HBCU institutions to make necessary changes. Findings also aided PWIs in promoting their institutions based on the perspectives of Black graduate students. This study added to the previous research findings on the success of HBCUs and why students choose PWIs over HBCUs for graduate degrees.

Practical

Historically Black Colleges and Universities need practical information that can be useful towards better accommodating students who enroll in their undergraduate and graduate programs. Universities and colleges are responsible for cultivating a sense of belonging for their diverse population. Institutions should also be concerned for their student's well-being; therefore, the need to understand how Black students perceive their experiences while in college should be a priority. Highlighting the voices of Black students by allowing them the opportunity to share their experiences can enlighten the administrators, faculty, and staff about how to best serve these students towards success which could ultimately increase their desire to return for graduate school after receiving undergraduate degrees.

This research study served as practical significance by developing a baseline for HBCUs to address this concern and the opportunity for more research. The knowledge generated from this study may be significant to HBCU institutions across the U.S., HBCU graduate and undergraduate programs, as well as PWI graduate programs. The findings give HBCUs insight as to why students are choosing to transition to other institutions after graduating undergrad. The findings also help HBCUs reassess their institution and focus any issues and/or gaps found. The data aids in developing a baseline for HBCUs to address concerns and the opportunity for more research to build upon it. In addition, it allows HBCUs to implement new practices to possibly retain more undergraduate college graduates. Lastly, this research highlights the benefits of Black students choosing a PWI for graduate school.

Research Questions

This research study focuses on one central research question and two sub-questions pertaining to the lived experiences of Black, HBCU graduates who transitioned to PWIs for graduate school. The research questions offered insight as to why students chose to leave their HBCU alma mater and transition to a PWI for higher-level degrees.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of Black HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school?

Sub-Question One

What factors inhibited HBCU graduates from returning to their alma mater for graduate school?

Sub-Question Two

What factors motivated HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school?

Definitions

There are several terms prevalent in the literature on HBCUs and students transitioning to PWIs for graduate school. Those that are relevant to this study are defined as follow:

1. *Black* – An individual who is a part of the African diaspora, regardless of if they are a United States or international citizen (Allen & Joseph, 2018).
2. *Historically Black College and University* – Institutions of higher education in the United States that primarily serve the African American community (Gaston & Ojewuyi, 2022).
3. *Higher Education* – Education beyond high school, especially at a college or university (Merriam-Webster, 2022).
4. *Alma Mater* - The school, college, or university that one once attended (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

5. *Graduate School* – A school that awards advanced academic degrees with the requirement that students must have earned a previous undergraduate degree (Wikipedia, 2022).
6. *Predominantly White Institution* – Institutions of higher education in the United States in which Whites account for at least 50% of the student enrollment (Gaston & Ojewuyi; 2022).

Summary

In summary, while HBCUs support both undergraduate and graduate programs, students attending for their undergraduate studies have the option of attending the same institution for their graduate degrees or leaving their alma mater for other opportunities. The problem is that many undergraduate Black students who graduate successfully, do not return for graduate degrees within the same HBCU. This causes HBCUs to lose Black students who are alumni to other competing universities, such as PWIs. When students leave and attend PWIs with the same graduate programs, it can possibly add on to the stereotypes and stigmas of HBCUs. To further investigate the problem, a phenomenological study was conducted to examine the perceptions of Black graduates who attended HBCUs for undergrad and transitioned to a PWI for graduate school. The researcher explored what motivated these students to transition to a PWI after their HBCU undergraduate experience. This research offers insight to HBCUs as to why they lose alumni for PWI graduate programs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic analysis of literature was completed to delve into the factors that motivated Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU) students to remain at their alma mater to obtain graduate degrees, as well as highlighting factors causing Black students to transition to Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) for graduate school. This review entails major content of the theoretical framework that undergirds the study. It also highlights current literature related to HBCU history and characteristics, the HBCU environment and culture, as well as HBCU success and hardships. Literature depicting Black student dropouts at HBCUs and Black, first-generation college students (FGCS) attending HBCUs is discussed. The topics of HBCU undergraduates and factors that influence them to transition to a different university for their graduate experiences is indicated. The research presented is related to benefits of transitioning and/or remaining with the same institution for graduate school and end with HBCU stereotypes and stigmas experienced within the U.S. Ultimately, the gap in the literature is recognized and the need for this study is demonstrated.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study utilizes the theoretical framework of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of motivation, founded by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This theory guides the foundation of the study design with emphasis on three stages that occurs when students prepare for higher education and their motivation. The perceptions of HBCU students are explored for what intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivate them to transition to PWIs for graduate degrees (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination focuses on individuals being centrally affected by motivation including how to move themselves or others to act (Duda & Appleton, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). The Self-Determination Theory of motivation was formulated by psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci in 1977 (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The SDT is a macro-theory of human motivation depicting human's innate motivational drive to master their social environments through self-determined actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2020). The theory begins with the assumption that persons are active organisms, with advanced developments toward growing, mastering challenges, and incorporating new experiences into a logical sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). The SDT is comprised of six mini theories that were all established to explain a set of motivationally based phenomena (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). Each mini theory also addresses one facet of motivation or personality functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). The mini theories of the SDT include the Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), Causality Orientations Theory (COT), Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), Goal Contents Theory (GCT), and Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT). In addition to the mini theories of SDT, the psychologists describe human actions as being led by self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The SDT depicts how actions are based on one's volition and endorsed by one's sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The theory defines volition as different types of intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation and how these sources can determine decisions (Ryan & Deci, 1985, 2000, 2020). In higher education, students can be influenced by extrinsic sources such as money, reward systems, the environment, evaluations, grades, and the opinion/approval of others (Harrison et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). Furthermore, students can also be motivated by intrinsic factors from within based on personal

interests, curiosity, or values (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Intrinsic motivations of human beings can nurture and produce passions, efforts, and creativity which are important for healthy development (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The nutriments for healthy development and functioning are specified using the concept of basic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Competence, autonomy, and relatedness are necessary for human functioning and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Humans need competence to focus on feeling effective with their social environment while also being able to express and demonstrate their abilities (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The need for competence in higher education is a necessity for Black students to feel satisfied within their environment and their personal performance amongst peers (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Encompassing competence also leads students to seek and understand challenges and issues within their environment, while attempting to maintain and improve their capacities (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In higher education settings, negative environments can challenge students' competence, further asserting their feelings of depression, lack of self-worth, and despair (Harrison, Martin, & Fuller, 2015). SDT theorizes that intrinsic motivation is impeded when interpersonal settings do not provide a sense of connection (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The second need of human functioning and performance is characterized as autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy is indicative of self-guidance throughout the decision-making process and one acting in accordance with their interests and values (Ryan & Deci, 2020). O'Hara (2017) suggested that people who feel more autonomous make better decisions. Every decision made by Black students in higher education are based upon their interests and personal values that guides them throughout their experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Choosing to transition to other institutions for graduate school and/or remaining within the same

undergraduate institution can be influenced by extrinsic factors; however, the influence aligns with values and interests that are integrated within the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Lastly, relatedness refers to the sense of individual and communal belonging, as well as caring for others and being cared for by others (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Relating to educational environments is an intrinsic motivation that internally promotes a sense of belonging and engaging for one's own sake (Martin, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Black students being able to relate to their environment, feel cared for by faculty and colleagues, and have a sense of belonging correlates to the last essential necessity of human functioning and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to Martin (2012), Black students represent one of the most academically at-risk populations and their motivational factors seem to be neglected by research (Martin, 2012). Within this study, the SDT is used as the framework to better understand Black HBCU graduates' motivation. This is done by exploring the intrinsic and extrinsic factors of what motivated students to leave their HBCU alma mater and transition to PWIs for graduate school.

Related Literature

A systematic review of the literature revealed several studies examining different aspects of HBCUs. The evidence from the literature provided insight into the history of HBCUs and HBCU characteristics. The characteristics of HBCUs are portrayed to involve environments, culture, success, hardships, dropouts, and Black, First-Generation College Students (FGCS). Literature also offers insight into different stances of experiences when transitioning to new colleges such as Predominantly White Institutions, and HBCU stereotypes that result in choosing PWIs. Studies exist on the benefits of HBCUs and that of PWIs for Black students. Although there is a lack of research on what motivates HBCU students return to their alma mater and why

students choose to transition to PWIs for graduate school, literature offers perspectives and findings to support the need for this study.

HBCU History

Historically, education has portrayed a significant role in the lives of Blacks (National Park Service, 2021; Palmer et al., 2009). HBCUs occupy a unique part of American history in education (Harrington & Thomas, 2018). Over two centuries, Blacks were denied any form or rights to education during slavery (Bracey, 2017). For instance, after the Stono Rebellion in 1739 in South Carolina, several states implemented laws making it illegal to teach slaves how to write (Bracey, 2017). The teaching and writing laws against slaves were later strengthened following Nat Turner's Revolt of 1831 (Bracey, 2017). If caught trying to read or write, Black individuals suffered violent beatings and even loss of life by lynching or gun shots (Bracey, 2017). Despite all the racial attacks and attempts to suppress Black education, at least 10% achieved literacy by 1865 (Bracey, 2017). The percentages of literacy continued to rise in the South eventually reaching 55% by 1890 during legal segregation (Bracey, 2017). Legal segregation of Blacks and Whites in the U.S. is what led to the establishment of HBCUs (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). The amended Higher Education Act of 1965 defines an HBCU as any accredited historically Black college or university established before 1964 whose mission is to educate Black Americans (Gordon et al., 2021; Harrington & Thomas, 2018).

HBCUs were formed after the promise of true freedom following the American Civil War which never achieved (Bracey, 2017; Jackson et al., 2019). Black Americans had no other option, but to begin their own higher education institutions (Bracey, 2017). Due to this, the first HBCUs were founded in the late 1800s by ex-slaves along with others in Black churches or those affiliated with Christian denominations (Bracey, 2017). Specifically, many abolitionists and

religious groups aided Blacks in establishing their own schools (Barnett et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2019). Not only were HBCUs formed to educate Blacks, but they also utilized education as a vehicle for addressing racial and other societal inequities (Barnett et al., 2016; Crewe, 2017). By 1953, more than 32,000 students were enrolled in private Black institutions including Fisk University, Hampton Institute, Howard University, Morehouse College, Tuskegee Institute, and Spelman College (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). In the same year, there were over 43,000 students enrolled in public Black colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). The few institutions founded before 1964 for Blacks will always have a unique educational history in comparison to other postsecondary institutions due to the struggles of Blacks to receive education (Johns & Jones-Castro, 2016).

In Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965, Congress defined HBCUs as an accredited school of higher learning whose principal mission is education of Blacks (Hunt, 2021). During the period of segregation in the United States, before the Civil Rights Act, majority of the institutions only served White Americans, while disqualifying and/or limiting Black Americans to enroll (Hunt, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 1991). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was established to create a more equitable opportunities and protect individuals from discrimination based on race, national origin or color in any program receiving federal funding (Hunt, 2021). A year after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title II of the Higher Education Act of 1965 was formed and defined HBCUs as institutions of higher learning that were accredited and established prior to 1964 (Hunt, 2021). The Higher Education Act of 1965 also required HBCU institutions to have a principal mission of serving Black Americans prior to supporting them with federal funds (Hunt, 2021). In addition, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established the Office of Civil Rights (Hunt, 2021). In 1969 and 1970, the Office of Civil Rights sued states who chose to

maintain separate systems of higher education based on race (Hunt, 2021). In 1977, courts ordered the federal government to establish new criteria for statewide desegregation (Hunt, 2021). The new criteria recognized HBCUs role in meeting the educational needs of Black students (Hunt, 2021). The new criteria also enhanced HBCUs by investing in their facilities, faculty, and other areas of financial support like their PWI counterparts (Hunt, 2021).

The need for this focus on racial and societal inequalities was supported by the fact that many HBCUs established during the civil rights movement experienced countless attacks from White supremacists (Bracey, 2017). For instance, Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi was attacked by White law enforcement officials on May 15, 1970 (Bracey, 2017). This HBCU was attacked because Black students were protesting the Vietnam War resulting in two students being killed and 12 being wounded by police gunfire (Spofford, 1988). The deaths of the two Black students killed went unreported and was not shown on national news in comparison to incidents that happened to their White counterparts (Spofford, 1988). Nevertheless, HBCUs have proven to be capable of withstanding difficult times.

HBCU Characteristics

The overall outcomes and characteristics of HBCUs have evolved since inception and has always been an integral part of higher education in the U.S. (Gasman et al., 2010; Palmer et al., 2016). Almost 30 years ago, HBCUs educated more than 90% of the Black population (Thomas, 2018). The Black population have been taught in private, public, large, small, religious, nonsectarian, two and four-year institutions (Johnson, et al., 2017; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). These institutions were established in 21 states and the Virgin Islands, with majority clustered in the Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic regions of the U.S. (Gordon et al., 2021). The state of Alabama has the most HBCUs totaling 15, although many are

only 2-year institutions (Gordon et al., 2021). North Carolina has the most 4-year HBCUs totaling 10 in the U.S. (Gordon et al., 2021). In 2006, HBCUs were estimated to be 3% of all nonprofit colleges with 106 HBCUs within the U.S. (Banks et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2017; Kim & Conrad, 2006). In 2020, there were 101 HBCUs located in 19 states (NCES, n.d.). Amongst the HBCUs are three theological seminaries, two medical schools, and two institutions that do not offer undergraduate degrees or certificates (Gordon et al., 2021). Seventy percent of Black doctors in the U.S. have a degree from an HBCU, 35% of lawyers are Black, and 50% of Black engineers and teachers derive from HBCUs (Johnson et al., 2017).

Enrollment in HBCUs provides students access to broad curricula, undergraduate degrees, and advanced degrees for the public (Bracey, 2017). Not only have Blacks benefitted from HBCUs, but HBCUs have also been beneficial for Whites and other students who may be unqualified for PWIs (Banks et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2019). On average, Black students encompass approximately 76% of HBCU enrollment, 9% Asian or Hispanic, and 15% White (Banks et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2019). Giving access to all students of any race and ethnicity qualified to attend their universities is a quality of HBCUs that differs in comparison to PWIs (Bracey, 2017; Mobley et al., 2022). HBCUs are notorious for educating all students, particularly, Black students who are from single parent homes, first generation college students, and/or with low socioeconomic backgrounds (Gordon et al., 2021). HBCUs educate approximately 300,000 students and employ well over 14,000 faculty members (Johnson et al., 2017).

In addition to offering education for all backgrounds and ethnicities, HBCUs have always been open to diverse instructors and administrators as well (Hiatt, 2019). Historically, HBCUs were staffed with many White instructors and administrators, while most of the student

population was Black (Hiatt, 2019). Overtime, Black graduates returned to their colleges as faculty and staff since employment at PWIs were closed to only a few Black scholars (Hiatt, 2019). The return of Black graduates aided in the increase and preparation of teachers of color for more than 100 years (Moffett & Frizzell, 2011). HBCUs also employed Jewish professors who fled Nazi Europe but were denied employment at PWIs due to their religion (Hiatt, 2019). Unlike PWIs, HBCUs became diverse institutions especially in relation to faculty and staff; thus, evolving the environment and culture of HBCUs (Hiatt, 2019).

HBCUs have also been representative of low-income students (Banks et al., 2018). HBCUs became the first minority serving institutions in the nation providing a myriad of quality opportunities for receiving accredited higher education (Barnett et al., 2016; Williams, 2022). These institutions can also be commended for graduating a multitude of famous leaders and legends who were involved in civil rights (Johnson et al., 2017). The common leaders include Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Spike Lee, and Thurgood Marshall among many others (Johnson et al., 2017). Not only have HBCUs provided a nurturing, family-like environment for all, but these environments have produced Black individuals who possess racial pride, self-efficacy, academic development and persistence, and psychological wellness (Garrett, 2015; Johnson et al., 2017; Lockett et al., 2018). HBCUs also have a long-standing history of providing community and public service to all, especially those less fortunate and minorities (Gordon et al., 2021).

HBCU Environments & Culture

HBCU campuses represent diversity, ethnicity, and racial issues (Hurtado et al., 1999; Jones & Phillips, 2020). The attitudes of the HBCU environment are often shaped by the internal and external factors such as government, socio-historical contexts, policy, and location (Hurtado

et al., 1999). Most HBCUs are located predominantly in Black communities but are also located primarily in rural areas (Smith et al., 2017). Some Black and/or rural neighborhoods tend to have a scarcity of quality grocery stores, magnified police brutality, and a high occurrence of violence and crime (Smith et al., 2017). On the contrary, Black and/or rural neighborhoods come with benefits for the Black student population (Abdullah, 2020). For instance, Abdullah (2020) mentioned that some advantages of rural HBCUs and those in Black communities include safety, lower costs of living, community-orientation, and fewer distractions in comparison to those in urban areas. Despite potential community barriers, HBCUs located within both Black communities and rural areas have a long-standing history of preparing students to engage within these underserved communities and culture (Smith et al., 2017).

In conjunction with serving the community and being seen as a foundation for Black culture, HBCU environments provide many benefits and opportunities for Black students (Williams et al., 2021). Known for nurturing Black, underserved students, HBCU environments offer a safe place to freely be themselves without judgement (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Bracey, 2017; Jackson, 2019; McCoy et al., 2017; Perna et al., 2009; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016; Smith et al., 2017). This level of support helps students feel empowered and encourages them to motivate each other (Lockett et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). HBCUs are also equipped to provide students with institutional support such as tutoring, remediation programs, school-sponsored celebrations for reaching academic success, and mentoring, (Lockett, 2017). The opportunity for Black students to connect with Black mentors' aid in the ability to identify daily struggles, cultural relatability, and life in general (Garrett, 2015).

HBCU campus culture further provides students with the opportunity to assess themselves in the context with special attention being given to the relationship between personal,

cultural, societal, and professional values (Williams, 2018). The psychological well-being such as positive self-image on HBCU campuses is much greater and more positive than it is for Black students on White campuses (Fleming, 1984). Within HBCUs, Black faculty often offer both social and psychological support towards the success of Black students including forming relationships (Williams, 2018). Johnson and Winfield (2022) determined that affordability, academic practices, diverse applicant pools, identity cultivation, and institutional values were critical components of having a supportive HBCU environment to aid students throughout their academic journeys towards success.

HBCU Success

As history continues to evolve, HBCUs have always been able to provide considerable higher education opportunities for Black and other ethnicities that have been underrepresented (Banks et al., 2018; Britton et al., 2022; Cheng et al., 2015; Gordon et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2017). According to Johnson et al. (2017), HBCUs provide society with invaluable scholars, researchers, leaders, doctors, pharmacists, nurses, and dentists amongst other professionals around the world. Over the last 160 years, HBCUs have been a major support by offering professional, vocational, scholarly, and political education for Black students (Britton et al., 2022). The success of Black students represents one of the most urgent issues in America (Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Herron & Drenon, 2022). Despite being underrated by society, HBCUs have successfully graduated many of the country's leading professionals (Johnson et al., 2017).

HBCUs have been successful in providing undergraduate training to a third of Blacks who have obtained doctoral degrees (Johnson et al., 2017). As college enrollment of Blacks continues to steadily rise, HBCUs graduate approximately 28% of Black students with

undergraduate degrees (Cheng et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2017; Kim & Conrad, 2006). During 2019-2020 academic years, HBCUs produced approximately 26,000 bachelors, 5, 000 master's degrees, and 1,650 doctoral degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Although HBCUs only make up 3% of the U.S. colleges and universities, they have produced a minimum of 26% of Black recipients with doctoral degrees in science and engineering between 2002 and 2011 (Jackson et al., 2019). Out of the top twenty-one bachelor level institutions, seven of those were HBCUs producing Blacks who earned PhDs in humanities (Jackson, 2019). Students from HBCUs are disproportionately likely to choose the sciences, engineering, or business as graduate majors than PWIs (Wengslinky, 1997; Williams & Johnson, 2019). This suggests that HBCUs encourage Black students to enter fields that are attractive by virtue of their lucrativeness rather than the tendency to promote community political action (Wengslinky, 1997; Williams & Johnson, 2019).

Qualitative researchers have found that HBCUs tend to enhance students' academic skills (Flowers et al., 2015; Johnson & Winfield, 2022). Some of the reputable schools, like Hampton University and Howard University have been awarded national and international recognition for academics (Bracey, 2017). In addition, HBCUs have developed online programs to support Black students and increase their overall likelihood of success (Harkness, 2015). For instance, an initiative approach at an HBCU developing an online learning program demonstrated much success for approximately 2600 students across five years (Harkness, 2015). Harkness (2015) found a 19.7% increase in courses from D grades to A, a 66% reduction in failing F course grades, and 23.5% reduction in withdrawal reports over five years.

Through the development of online programs and the continued evolution of HBCUs, they have become the economic engines for their communities (Humphreys, 2017). Due to the

success of economic returns, HBCUs have generated a substantial number of resources every year (Humphreys, 2017). Furthermore, HBCUs successfully prepare Black students to compete in the job market with Whites by producing better thinkers and learners with great expertise (Humphreys, 2017; Wenglinsky, 1997). Through the success of being economic engines for their communities, HBCUs can offer affordable costs to students who are less likely to attend college due to the cost; thus, producing higher rates of graduation for minorities (Humphreys, 2017). Gordon et al. (2020) found HBCUs have a higher graduation rate for African American students than other ethnic groups that choose to attend.

HBCUs have also been successful in producing graduate programs for Black students (Gordon et al., 2020). These institutions rank high with undergraduates pursuing and completing graduate school and professional training (Johnson et al., 2017; Rankins, 2019). Clodfelter (2019) determined a key benefit of attending HBCUs is that Black graduates from an HBCU are more likely than Black students from PWIs to enroll in graduate school and more likely to remain there, suggesting they may be somewhat better prepared for the experience. Moreover, HBCU students are more likely than PWI students to pursue graduate education and aspire to a professional career (Humphreys, 2017). Once students enroll, HBCU students are more likely than PWI students to remain in graduate school, also suggesting that they may be somewhere better prepared (Humphreys, 2017).

Gordon et al. (2021) also found Black students attending HBCUs are 33% more likely to graduate than Black students who chose to attend other institutions (Gordon et al., 2021). Additionally, while HBCUs may be rated lower in performance than PWIs, they outperform when comparisons are made, especially having more students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds and/or poor college preparedness (Gordon, et al., 2021). These students exhibit

better academic performance, greater social involvement with faculty and peers, and higher occupational aspirations than their peers at PWIs (Allen, 1992). Roebuck and Murty (1993) describe HBCUs as:

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are Black academic institutions established prior to 1964 whose principal mission was, and still is, the education of Black Americans...They were founded and developed in an environment unlike that [of] surrounding other colleges-that is, in a hostile environment marked by legal segregation and isolation from mainstream U.S. higher education...They have maintained a very close identity with the struggle of Blacks for survival, advancement, and equality in American society...These institutions have championed the cause of equal opportunity, have provided an opportunity for many who would not otherwise have graduated from college, and have served as the custodians of the archives for Black Americans as centers for the study of Black culture (p. 2).

HBCU Hardships

In addition to their successes, HBCUs face many structural and demographic hardships compared to other higher education institutions (Britton et al., 2022; Crawford, 2017). Structural and demographic challenges faced by HBCUs involved decreased demands for enrollment after desegregation, minimal access to financial benefits and resources provided by the state governments in comparison to PWIs, and high rates of leadership turnover (Britton et al., 2022; Gasman & Commodore, 2014). Black institutions have also endured discrimination from accrediting agencies (Britton et al., 2022; Gasman & Commodore, 2014). Moreover, HBCUs have historically been underfunded in comparison to the public PWIs; thus, face economic polarization (Bracey, 2017; Johnson, 2019).

HBCUs providing education to Blacks are consistently challenged with obstacles (Cheng et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2017; Karkouti, 2016; Walker, 2019). They constantly experience increasing costs, accreditation pressures, legislative oversight, competition from PWIs, and part-time faculty (Andrews et al. 2016; Britton et al., 2022; Crawford, 2017; Provasnik & Shafer, 2004). In the 21st century, obstacles, and challenges of HBCUs included declining enrollments, low graduation, and retention rates, decreased endowments, and reduced financial support (Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Johnson et al., 2017; Parry, 2019; Walker, 2019). As an example of declining enrollment, in 2020 there were a total of 101 HBCUs within 19 states (NCES, n.d.). The total number of HBCU students admitted increased by 47% between 1976 and 2010; however, admissions decreased by 15% between 2010 and 2020 (NCES, n.d.). In comparison, the number of students from all-degree granting institutions increased 91% between 1976 and 2010 and decreased by 10% between 2010 and 2020 (NCES, n.d.). Not only are admissions decreasing, but HBCUs also see lower overall graduation rates than their PWI counterparts (Johnson et al., 2017). In 2014, the graduation rates for four-year HBCUs were estimated at 59% with no HBCU seeing graduation rates above 70% in comparison to PWIs (Johnson et al., 2017).

Due to the historic marginalization of HBCUs, these institutions have never had enough resources and financial support as Predominantly White Institutions (Britton et al., 2022; Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Winkle-Wagner, 2019). Jones (2018) highlighted how HBCUs often operate within limited resourceful conditions; thus, demonstrating an imbalance between funding for HBCUs and non-HBCUs within states (Johnson & Winfield, 2022). Trends of fluctuating federal funds throughout the years have led to an increased reliance on tuition to cover operational expenses and limits opportunities to revamp and expand the infrastructure on campus (Johnson & Winfield, 2022). Smith-Barrow (2019) mentioned that rising college costs,

student loan crisis, and federal budget cuts are all negatively impacting HBCUs, where nearly every three in five attendees are first-generation, low-income students. Seventy percent of these students have limited financial resources ultimately impacting the universities (Smith-Barrow, 2019). Furthermore, limited resources caused 15 HBCUs to close since 1997 (Smith-Barrow, 2019). In addition, because of limited financial resources, both public and private HBCU endowments are approximately 70% smaller than PWIs (Smith-Barrow, 2019). Private HBCUs experienced a 42% decline in federal funding between 2003 and 2015 (Smith-Barrow, 2019). More research is necessary to discover specific methods, procedures, or practices that are used to foster success for Black students at HBCUs (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). In addition to the many institutional hardships, HBCU students also often experience hardships throughout their collegial experience.

HBCU Student Hardships

Traditionally, Black college students are seen as either demonstrating resilience or perceived as at risk for attrition (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015). Understanding factors that contribute to Black college students' success involves the examination of their resilience including social responsibility, social competency, and agency (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015). Factors of resilience include racial enactments, outcomes, school/community engagement, and stress-coping responses (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015).

Black students must exhibit these factors of resilience because they often experience financial pressures, exclusion, discrimination, increased life stressors, and structural barriers (Berzenski, 2019). For example, Black students rely more heavily on loans and grants to pay tuition and often take out loans at higher rates than students of other races (McGee, 2022). Black

students may also take longer to pay off the student debt loans which limits wealth gain and increases the hardship of debt overtime (McGee, 2022). A national report on student persistence in higher education revealed the persistence rate between 2016-2017 was 73% depicting how more than a quarter of students dropped out after their first year of college due to student hardships (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018). Within this percentage, Black students had the lowest persistence rate at 67% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018). Finding more effective ways to support underrepresented college students is important to examine further (Berzenski, 2019).

When examining the differences between Black and White students, a study suggested receiving support from the university and family, in addition to campus engagement is more important for minority students than it is for White students (Xu & Webber, 2018). Xu and Webber (2018) found psychosocial engagement to be more important for minority students, while academic engagement of more importance for White students when predicting dropouts. In addition, Xu and Webber (2018) found that goal planning and commitment was more important for minority students, but not Whites when predicting plans to drop out of college.

HBCU Dropouts

Black college student dropout is a hardship experienced by both students and HBCUs. Although HBCUs produce successful Black graduates, they also encounter low graduation rates at an average 35% (McGee, 2022). According to Chen (2012), the overall risk of HBCU dropout is higher in the first year than during any of the other years. On the contrary, Ishitanti (2016) found that ethnic minority students had a higher risk of dropout in year three at HBCUs. Approximately 30% to 50% of all Black first-generation college students depart HBCUs after their first year of academics (Azmitia, et al., 2018). Students failing to reach graduation due to

dropout is a serious problem affecting both a country's educational system and the economy due to the large educational investment made by the government (Sandoval-Palis et al., 2020).

The issue of HBCU dropouts can be the result of several factors, including academics, socio-economic backgrounds, and student motivation (Respondek & Seufert, 2020; Sandoval-Palis et al., 2020). Academic retention and socio-economic background statuses has been determined to be major determinants of the success within an HBCU; thus, negatively affecting a student's ability to remain within the institution (Respondek & Seufert, 2020; Sandoval-Palis et al., 2020). Poor academic control has also been shown to destabilize Black student motivation and achievement; therefore, leading to negative consequences such poor grades and ultimately university dropout (Respondek & Seufert, 2020; Sandoval-Palis et al., 2020). According to Berzenski (2019), performing well academically during the first semester is a predictor of graduation and can determine who will potentially drop out (Berzenski, 2019).

Other factors influencing college persistence and student prediction of graduation can be recognized by institutional characteristics, demographic characteristics, and the relationships between the student and institution (Berzenski, 2019). For instance, demographic characteristics influencing dropout rates include but are not limited to lower socioeconomic status, minority status, male gender, and lower parental educational attainment and/or classified as first-generation students (Chen 2012). Some students also dropout due to a lack of sense of belonging and their connection to the university, how they have been welcomed, and their community (Berzenski, 2019). The quality of the college and financial aid both have positive effects on graduation rates at HBCUs, while the cost of college can have a negative effect on matriculation for those who can't afford it or receive financial support (Cheng et al., 2015). Moreover, for

Black students, discriminating experiences such as being confused as janitorial staff and/or poor immigrants has also caused them to depart ways with the institution (Azmitia et al., 2018).

When comparing attrition rates of HBCUs and PWIs, Black students attending HBCUs tend to persist throughout their higher education experiences at lower rates than White undergraduates attending PWIs (Witteveen & Attewell, 2022). Lower rates have been depicted for Blacks attending HBCUs although it has been shown that both Black students and their parents value their education just as much as other racial groups (Witteveen & Attewell, 2022). Blake (2018) found that Blacks demonstrated an increased likelihood to pursue HBCUs when they had the opportunity to do so in comparison to other ethnicities attending PWIs. The total completion rates of Black students attending HBCUs in comparison to White students attending PWIs has been unchanged for the last two decades (Shapiro et al., 2017). According to Berzenski (2019), HBCU student success should be supported and held to the utmost of importance in higher education. This level of success is defined by students ultimately graduating with a college degree (Berzenski, 2019).

Black First-Generation College Students

There are specific student groups at risk of dropping out of HBCUs, including Black FGCS. HBCUs have catered to and emphasized academic programs catering to first-generation college students from long suffering Black families (Bracey, 2017). HBCUs have the highest percentage of students who are first-generation students eligible for financial aid and with lower income than those of PWIs (Jackson et al., 2019). Although HBCUs tend to support Black FGCS, this population typically has different cultural values, goals, and traditions compared to students who derive from educated families (Azmitia et al., 2018; Covarrubias et al., 2018; Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Moreover, these students experience discrepancies between the

opportunities provided to them compared to those available to their non-college-educated families (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Longmire-Avital et al., 2013). The lack of opportunities family members may have received compared to the FGCS typically results in family achievement guilt (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

Due to family guilt, Black FCGS are often hesitant or indecisive when choosing to leave home to become college students because families and neighborhood friends do not understand the reasoning behind leaving (Azmitia et al., 2018; Covarrubias et al., 2018). Black, FCGS who choose to leave home are often overwhelmed by both college and home responsibilities and/or feel homesick and lonely on campus (Azmitia et al., 2018). A study conducted by Williams and Ferrari (2015) explored the relationships between sense of community with first-generation students from a myriad of backgrounds. These students completed an instrument focused on measuring feelings of belongingness (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). The findings revealed students who were first-generation college students had a higher sense of community than non-first-generation college students; thus, demonstrating the necessity of campus support (Williams & Ferrari, 2015).

In addition to handling family guilt, FGCSs typically experience higher rates of financial insecurity, increased difficulty, and hesitancy engaging with peers and campus activities, and decreased levels of academic competence and how they see themselves (Pratt et al., 2019). Due to the many hurdles, only 36% of low-income students enroll in college within the U.S. (Azmitia et al., 2018). When FGCS choose to enroll, they are four times more likely to drop out of college after the first year than those that are not FGCS (Azmitia et al., 2018; Covarrubias et al., 2019). They are also 50% less likely to finish college than students who are not first-generation (Azmitia et al., 2018). FGCS who drop out often feel unwelcomed, experience financial

difficulties, feel unprepared academically, lack school spirit due to no competitive sports teams or other interests, and/or they experience discrimination (Azmitia et al., 2018; Covarrubias et al., 2018). Other reasons reported pertaining to FGCS dropouts included the HBCU having a lack of competitive sports teams and other interests resulting in the students lacking school spirit (Azmitia et al., 2018).

Despite the existing barriers and complications, many FGCS who attend HBCUs graduate and become role models for other Black individuals (Azmitia et al., 2018). Obtaining a college degree is essential for Black, FCGSs to gain upward mobility within the U.S. (Azmitia et al., 2018). Azmitia et al. (2018) completed a qualitative study focusing on identifying what challenges FGCS have during their college transition and throughout college. The authors also identified what resources were used to overcome the challenges and what association existed between the resources and challenges to FGCS academic persistence (Azmitia et al., 2018). Results from the study revealed that FGCS who overcame the many challenges and successfully graduated were receiving emotional support from friends and family (Azmitia et al., 2018). The successful students also developed campus relationships with their university faculty, staff, and classmates (Azmitia et al., 2018).

Choosing a Graduate Institution

For all students including FGCSs, choosing a graduate institution to attend is one of the most important decisions one will have to make in their adult lives (Van Camp et al., 2010; Loveless, 2022). The college of choice will have a lasting impression on a student's personal and professional life (Loveless, 2022). According to Wright and Kowalek (2016), attending a university different from the alma mater can offer other opportunities to experience, while also diversifying the student's resume. On the contrary, students may also experience new challenges

when choosing not to stay at the same institution for graduate school (Garrett, 2015; Mitchell, 2018; Wright & Kowalek, 2016). Students may experience feelings of starting over and re-establishing their identities as they choose their graduate school of choice (Wright & Kowalek, 2016). Other difficulties may include missing the undergraduate institution along with possibly being further away from home (Williams & Ferrari, 2015; Wright & Kowalek, 2016). The benefits of attending the same university for graduate school involve being able to brand yourself as a professional, building new connections, and becoming a mentor to younger and/or new students (Wright & Kowalek, 2016).

Black Students Choosing a Graduate Institution

When considering a graduate institution as a Black student, many factors are considered for these students, such as engagement with like ethnicities, cultures, circumstance, and location of the institutions. Limited engagement with other students of the same ethnicity has been a factor motivating Black students to attend an HBCU for graduate school (Johnson, 2019; Williams, 2018). Students who attended predominantly White high schools experienced racial isolation contributing to their desire to attend an HBCU for their undergraduate degrees and graduate degrees (Johnson, 2019). Van Camp et al. (2010) found that students who had less contact with other Black people growing up and felt they lacked cultural awareness (e.g., an understanding of Black history) were more likely to cite race-related reasons for choosing to enroll at an HBCU for all of their higher education experiences. It has been shown that Black students' express feelings of satisfaction with their sense of self, while White students attending reported a lack of certainty in their racial identity (Henry & Closson, 2010).

Race-related reasons for choosing an HBCU include past experiences and intentions to engage in racial identity activities aids in developing future behaviors (Van Camp et al., 2010).

Tatum (2017) found that Black students often seek out one another to find physical places of refuge and comfort with those who share the same racial identity. Despite having the comfort of being around those of the same racial identity, many Black graduates still transition to PWIs.

Van Camp et al. (2010) explored the experiences and consequences of HBCUs, and race-related reasons of why 109 Black students chose the university. Using a questionnaire, the students assessed their race-related reasons for choosing their selected HBCU including their intentions to engage in race-related activities (Van Camp et al., 2010). The findings demonstrated students who grew up with less contact or more central racial identities were more likely to cite race-related reasons for HBCU college choice for both undergraduate and graduate experiences (Van Camp et al., 2010). In addition, lack of contact and higher racial centrality predicted the students having a greater intention to engage in behaviors to develop racial identity such as race-oriented clubs and personal readings (Van Camp et al., 2010). Establishing meaningful relationships with other college students is important in the success of high-achieving collegians and could be a factor in choosing what institution to attend (Goings, 2016). Racial experiences may be different at HBCUs and PWIs; however, these encounters must be contextualized within larger social issues (Mwangi et al., 2018). Choosing the right graduate school to attend for Black students has also been found to be predicated upon circumstance rather than their outright choice (Hilton & Bonner, 2017). According to Hilton and Bonner (2017), choosing the right graduate school can be based on the student's physical location being in an urban or rural area and whether they are first, second, or third generation college students. Black students also choose graduate colleges for academic, economic, and social reasons such as reputation of the institution, social life, tuition rates, financial aid, and academic department (Braddock & Hua, 2006; Van Camp et al., 2010). Any of these reasons for choosing a graduate college can be stressful for the student. A

qualitative study examined if attending HBCUs vs PWIs had an impact on the level of stress, perceived faculty support, the student's perception of the campus environment, and their perceived family support (Mitchell, 2018). This study's sample size was 414 Black undergraduate students who attended either a PWI or an HBCU for graduate school (Mitchell, 2018). By way of an online survey, it was determined that those attending an HBCU reported lower levels of stress than those at PWIs (Mitchell, 2018). In addition, those at PWIs had reports of less faculty support than those at HBCUs (Mitchell, 2018). Those students attending HBCUs also had reports of more positive perceptions than those attending PWIs (Mitchell, 2018). This study determined overall that HBCUs provided more nurturing experiences than their counterparts (Mitchell, 2018).

Another qualitative study examined 70 Black high school students' consideration to matriculate into a HBCU (Freeman, 1999). This study found that relatives could motivate Black students to attend an HBCU (Freeman, 1999). In addition, student choices to attend an HBCU for college was based on avoiding being in cultural isolation, a desire to seek knowledge, and empowerment from the Black culture (Freeman, 1999; Williams et al., 2021). Research exists for choosing a graduate school including both theory and empirical research on the experience of White students choosing their college of choice; but it is limited with Black students (Van Camp et al., 2010; Smith & Fleming, 2006).

Black Students Transitioning to PWI's

In the past 40 years, Black students have demonstrated a significant increase in enrolling at PWIs (Shahid et al., 2017). There is a total of 40 PWIs within the U.S. that enroll on average, the highest percentages of Black students of all PWIs every year (College Express, 2022). Although HBCUs were established for Black students to be able to attend postsecondary

education institutions, many Black students choose to attend PWIs (Garrett, 2015; Johnson, 2019). During the late twentieth century, trends have shown a shift in undergraduate enrollment of Black students from HBCUs to PWIs (Johnson, 2019). Anderson (2017) noted that desegregation, availability of financial aid, and increase in income has opened the door for options to attend PWI higher education, resulting in a decline in HBCU enrollment since 1970. A Black student reported she chose to attend a PWI for graduate school because of the school's resources, amount of financial aid offered in comparison to what was offered at the HBCU, the experience, the familiar culture in comparison to childhood, and their lack of desire to remain in the Southern states (Humphrey, 2018).

Contrary to Black student experiences and desires, many Predominantly White Institutions fail to exemplify a sustained commitment to educate Black students and struggle with creating racial diversity across the U.S.; although many focus on recruiting Black student athletes for different sport programs with little to no regard for their education (Bracey, 2017; Davis & Gasman, 2011; Minor, 2008; Palmer et al., 2011). For some PWIs, Blacks have been only good enough to assist in winning games (Palmer et al., 2011). There have been efforts to broaden admissions to include those of diverse backgrounds; however, these efforts do not eliminate students from experiencing insults and abuse from Whites at PWIs (Bracey, 2017). Despite appearing diverse in nature, many PWIs combat impediments when retaining and graduating Black students (McClain, 2017). White administrators also often lack sensitivity pertaining to the educational needs and safety of their Black students (Bracey, 2017). Over the past few decades, PWIs have made tremendous strides towards correcting their past transgressions contributing to the high dropout rates of Black students and increased transfer rates away from PWIs (McClain, 2017).

In higher education, students should feel accepted and valued to develop a sense of belonging on campus (Booker, 2016). When non-majority students experience a negative college climate, they often convey feelings of uncertainty and isolation; thus, leading to an unwelcomed and unsupported feeling on campus (Campbell-Whatley et al., 2021). According to Garrett (2015), Black students along with other minorities, often feel invisible in the classrooms of PWIs by their peers and faculty members. In another study, findings revealed that Black students applied and were accepted into PWIs; however, transferred afterwards after feeling they were not accepted and/or did not fit in well on campus (Williams et al., 2021). Half of the 80 participants in the study by Williams et al. (2021) reported a concern for their safety based on their skin color and identity at their PWI campus. Another study identified that Black students at PWIs struggle with psychological adjustments more than the White students (Smith et al., 2014). Black students often feel marginalized and intimidated within the classroom at PWIs amongst other institutional facets (Gossett et al., 1998). For many Black students, choosing to enroll at PWIs requires them to confront White culture and bias behaviors on a regular basis (Garrett, 2015; Webb et al., 2018). Garrett (2015) found some Black students approach difficult situations to nullify the negative stereotypes that are against their race.

Many students enroll in PWIs with unfulfilled promises the racial climate of the HBCU campus (Morgan et al., 2020). Black students attending PWIs tend to experience less satisfaction with the academic environments and deem it more difficult to fit in with the institutional context and culture (Allen, 1992, Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015). Feelings of not fitting in correlation to Black students' inability to perform well academically at PWIs (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015). Black students attending PWIs have attrition rates that are more than one half higher than the White students (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Thompson, 2017).

Blacks attending PWIs indicated the experiences they hoped to receive were completely different from reality (Engram, 2019; Karkouti, 2016). According to Engram's (2019) qualitative study, many PWIs fail to provide all-inclusive atmosphere's that are conducive to everyone's learning. Another study by Garrett (2015) focused on how Black students came to the decision of choosing to attend a PWI rather than an HBCU. This qualitative study emphasized that Black students who enter colleges mainly at PWIs, experience racism which is often overwhelming (Garrett, 2015). Garrett (2015) highlighted that standardized testing used for determining admittance has history of criticism for its racial bias such as testing verbal skills most likely used in White. Using a sample size of fourteen students, the results varied in reasonings behind the student's decisions (Garrett, 2015). The results showed that students believed HBCUs are not rigorous in their academic programs and a degree from an HBCU would not be as prestigious (Garrett, 2015). Other students suggested they wanted a more diversified learning environment, but had no negative views towards HBCUs (Garrett, 2015). The students also reported their choice of a PWI over an HBCU resulted in tension from the Black community who questioned their 'Blackness' (Garrett, 2015).

Exposure to race-related stressors such as discrimination may take a toll on Black, undergraduate students who choose to attend PWIs (Griffith, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017; Shahid et al., 2017). Griffith et al. (2017) found that Black students reported experiencing a wide range of race-related stressors at a PWI. Ten Black students reported a heightened awareness of negative stereotypes by Whites due to issues of underrepresentation in academic spaces and that Blacks were intellectually inferior (Griffith et al., 2017). The authors also reported the students faced intentional, blatant discrimination and unintentional racial insults (Griffith et al., 2017). Shahid et al. (2017), explored stress from racial tension experienced among 129 Black undergraduate

women at PWIs. The authors found that these students had experienced race-related stressors related to racial discrimination, culture shock, and prejudice resulting in a decrease in academic performance, social adjustment, and psychological well-being (Boyras et al., 2016; Shahid et al., 2017). Moreover, Spencer (2020) depicted incidents that Black students endured on campuses of PWIs including discriminatory remarks such as “We do not want you here” and “You do not belong.” The “acting White” accusation has also been found to be an issue for Black students who choose to attend HBCUs (Webb et al., 2018). Webb et al. (2018) examined the impact of a predominantly White environment and the pervasiveness of the burden of “acting White.” The authors explored if Black students were affected by the stigma of “acting White” (Webb et al., 2018). Cox (2020) reported Black, PWI students must avoid being labeled as being “too black” or “inauthentically” Black by White students while also working to be seen as “Black enough” by their Black peers.

Mickleson and Oliver (1991) discussed Black students attending PWIs often experience issues with family obligations, hostile social and racial climates, financial needs, inadequate social and psychological support systems. Decisions about college choice have been found to be influenced by parents, students, and the characteristics of the institution (Iloh, 2018). Parental influences include parent income, their education, and the level of encouragement they provide to the students (Iloh, 2018).

HBCU Stereotypes and Stigmas

HBCUs have had an extensive practice and history of positively impacting and educating Black students; however, in addition to declining enrollment, they encounter other barriers such as stereotypes and stigmas hindering their growth (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Changing the HBCU narrative portraying racial and systemic barriers has been institutional goals, as well as

goals of faculty members whose ancestors were enslaved (Crewe, 2017). Since the inception of HBCUs, the academic integrity of the university's faculty capabilities and curriculum difficulty has been questioned for its effectiveness (Jencks & Riesman, 1967). It has been said that the academic integrity of HBCUs lack new ideas, knowledgeable students and faculty, and creative works (Jordan & Brown, 2021). There is a stereotype within the U.S. that succeeding at HBCUs are not equivalent to doing as well as PWIs and they lack academic competitiveness (Garrett, 2015; Thompson, 2017). Misconceptions have also historically existed with the stigma that HBCUs do not provide the same quality of education as PWI counterparts or that they lack competitiveness (Garrett, 2015; Jordan & Brown, 2021; Thompson, 2017). Moreover, HBCUs are classified as less than when it comes to delivering quality education (Jordan & Brown, 2021). Those who support these institutions and/or choose to attend receive scrutiny and negative stigmas despite the proven academic success of HBCUs (Bridges et al., 2008).

Not only are there academic stereotypes for HBCU's, but there are cultural stereotypes as well. Garrett (2015) described stereotypes such as HBCU being party schools in comparison to PWIs and why enrollment rates at these institutions have declined. The culture of HBCUs have been stereotyped as high party atmospheres with low study hours, high alcohol and drugs, and students being engrossed in sororities and fraternities (Tankard, 2018). Another stereotype is that HBCUs do not assist in assimilating Black students into White cultures and preparing them for the real world (Garrett, 2015; Thompson, 2017). The last stereotype found reported HBCUs have a lack of resources and are not as equally resourceful as their PWI counterparts with fewer student opportunities (Garrett, 2015; Humphrey, 2018; Tankard, 2018). These stereotypes, amongst many others, can negatively influence Black students to enroll and negatively influence their desire to transition within the HBCU to graduate school.

Summary

In summary, HBCUs have played a vital role in the lives of many students with different cultural backgrounds. HBCUs were developed to help those less privileged; however, a variety of students attend these institutions for both undergraduate and graduate level studies.

Researchers have examined the differences between HBCUs and PWIs, Black student success, HBCU dropouts, and first-time college student experiences (Azmitia et al., 2018; Cheng et al., 2015; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Goings, 2016; Johnson et al., 2017; Karkouti, 2016; Rankins, 2019; Williams & Ferrari, 2015).

There have been multiple qualitative studies completed that are unique to the HBCU population. It has been examined why students may choose one type of institution over the other and the complexities of within-group differences related to socioeconomic diversity, graduation rates, and persistence (Longmire-Avital & Miller-Dyce, 2013; Mitchell, 2018; Wright & Kowalek, 2016). There is a gap in literature, with little to no qualitative research found on what motivates HBCU undergraduate students to return to the same institution for their graduate degrees; thus, seeking Predominantly White Institutions as graduate opportunities. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore these factors and develop a baseline for HBCUs to address this concern. Findings have the potential to inform the development of new practices to retain more undergraduate college graduates.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences of students who attended HBCUs for their undergraduate degrees and transitioned to a PWI for graduate school. This transcendental phenomenological study explored what factors motivated Black HBCU, graduate students to transition to a PWI for graduate school and what factors inhibited them from staying at their HBCU alma mater for graduate school. This chapter provides insight into the methods that were utilized in the study. The research design is depicted along with the research questions that guided the study. This chapter also provides detailed information of the research setting, participants, and researcher's role. Methods of data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are also discussed.

Research Design

The chosen research method for exploring the experiences of HBCU, Black alumni who are now graduate students of PWIs was a qualitative method. Qualitative was chosen over quantitative, because it is important to understand why students are making certain decisions rather than actual numbers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research involves gaining a complex, detailed understanding of the issue being studied. Qualitative characteristics are described as collecting field data in natural environments where the issues may be experienced, multiple sources of data, and focusing on the meaning of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), using a phenomenological design allows the researcher(s) to understand or describe lived experiences and focus on what individuals have in common. This

method and design links directly to the purpose of this study to explore the perceptions of HBCU alumni who are now PWI graduate students. The study explored what motivated HBCU alumni to transition to PWIs for graduate school. This design was appropriate to explore the perceptions of a group of students lived experiences within an HBCU that motivate them to either return or leave at their alma mater for graduate school. The problem is many students tend to transition to PWIs with the same degrees as HBCUs rather than remain within their HBCU alma mater for graduate studies.

A transcendental phenomenological approach was determined to be the right choice for this study as it allowed the opportunity to explore perceived experiences of graduate students and their feelings. The initial step in phenomenological data analysis was epoché used to minimize the effects of my personal biases and opinions in the analysis and representation of findings (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). Epoché is a Greek term that means to put off judgment (Moustakas, 1994). I made my preconceived opinions, judgments, and prejudices evident, then set them aside to be more sensitive to the participants' perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). I completed this epoché through reflective meditation, which entailed allowing my preconceptions and prejudgments to freely enter and exit my mind until I felt satisfied and free of the thoughts (Moustakas, 1994). These thoughts were bracketed throughout the research process. Understanding what encourages students to stay or leave without my bias assisted in promoting better HBCU environments. I used two focus groups, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, and student documentation of a recording of advice to a HBCU undergraduate student to determine the essence of the shared phenomena of the participants and use the data to find any common themes that may exist. The study took place using a virtual platform, Zoom.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of Black HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school?

Sub-Question One

What factors inhibited HBCU graduates from returning to their alma mater for graduate school?

Sub-Question Two

What factors motivated HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school?

Setting and Participants

This section gives insight into the chosen setting for this study. It highlights aspects of the setting and why it was chosen. The section also offers details on the participant population.

Lastly, it depicts the chosen population's demographics, inclusionary, and exclusionary criteria.

Setting

The setting of this research project took place on a virtual platform, Zoom. The chosen PWIs in which the participants were attending varied in year of development, degree programs, geographical locations, and the number of students being admitted and graduating on a yearly basis. The campuses were located within the U.S. and from the Southeastern region. Degree programs included bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels at either public or private institutions. Each campus housed a myriad of colleges including, but not limited to the College of Health Sciences, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, and College of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics amongst several others. PWIs were chosen as many of them offer graduate level programs and they are equal opportunity schools that admit Black students.

Participants

Participants were initially selected using convenience sampling through personal, professional, and institutional contacts using social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Convenience sampling was used because I have direct access and awareness of potential participants who meet the criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From the initial sample, snowball sampling was utilized by asking participants if they know of any additional participants who meet the inclusionary criteria and would be interested in participating (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study included Black, graduate students between the ages 22 to 40 years old. There was a total of 10 participants, 3 males and 7 females who participated in the study. The inclusionary criteria included young adult students aged 22 to 40 years old, graduate, Black students currently attending a PWI or recent graduate (within 1 year) and must have obtained an undergraduate degree from an HBCU. Students who were not between the ages of 22 to 40 years of age, not enrolled as a Black, graduate student at a PWI or recent PWI graduate within a year of conducting the study and did not obtain an undergraduate degree from an HBCU were excluded from the study.

Researcher Positionality

As the human instrument in this qualitative study, it is important to share my motivation for conducting this study using the post-positivism worldview. This section also depicts how my philosophical assumptions concerning ontology, epistemology, and axiology guide the study.

Interpretive Framework

I hold a post-positivism worldview which acknowledges that the researcher's identity influences what is observed and concluded (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Post-positivism seeks to obtain objective answers by first recognizing self-biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McGlinchey,

2021). I recognized potential bias as a Black, assistant professor who worked at a graduate program at an HBCU and now works at another minority-serving institution in a graduate level program. I have personal thoughts of why students should remain within the university and transition to graduate programs to support HBCU graduate programs. As the one collecting data, conducting the interviews, and analyzing the collected data, it was important to have recognized my own biases as the researcher. Recognizing this bias, and taking steps to minimize (i.e., engaging in epoché and bracketing), I was able to gather an authentic understanding of why students choose to transition to PWIs following undergraduate HBCU experiences.

Philosophical Assumptions

Embracing a post-positivism framework, I hold corresponding philosophical assumptions. In this section, I describe personal values and beliefs and correlate my personal values and beliefs to each philosophical assumption. This section highlights my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions that shape this inquiry.

Ontological Assumption

Ontology focuses on the nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My ontological assumptions behind this research project stem from my experiences as a HBCU graduate professor. I have always had the desire to understand the motivation behind Black students graduating an HBCU and then choosing to transition to a PWI for graduate school. In addition, my personal values are based on the Holy Bible and Christian upbringing. I am aware that my professional career and spiritual foundation and beliefs can influence the outcome of this phenomenological study. It is assumed that participants in this study have their own perceptions, views, and meanings based on their life experiences. Holding the ontological assumption, I functioned as the human instrument and gather data involving the students' experiences, feelings,

and thoughts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To gain insight on these personal experiences of students, I used two focus groups, individual interviews, and video responses to create a composite of their life experiences. During this data collection, I set aside my own assumptions and feelings to support a consistent account of experiences through reflective meditation. Prior to collecting data, I reflected on my own personal feelings and views of why students should attend HBCUs for graduate school and what my own experience has shown me as to why they may leave.

Epistemological Assumption

As a previous employee of an HBCU in a graduate program and current employer at a minority-serving institution, many things are known and highlighted that are potential negative and positive influencers. The epistemological assumption focuses on knowledge, justifying knowledge, and the relationship between what is being researched and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Epistemology is a way of understanding and being able to explain how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). I experienced recruiting and interviewing qualified prospective students for the HBCU graduate program and many transitioning to PWIs after being offered a slot for the program. As a faculty member of this HBCU at the time, I was unable to gain knowledge from the Black students who chose to decline the offer to understand their justifications. This study allowed me to retrieve subjective data from the students based on their individual experiences at the HBCUs and the reasons these Black students chose to transition to a PWI. Some experiences may have been taken for granted based on individually negative impacts that occurred during their HBCU experience, altering their overall experience.

Axiological Assumption

Axiology is the study of value or theory on the nature of value; it deals with what do we find worthy in life (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016). Using the axiological assumption, I was

aware of personal values and biases towards the university. Completing a study on students as a prior HBCU student brought areas of potential bias based on my personal experiences and what I value. In addition, being a prior faculty member of an HBCU had room for potential bias when thinking why students choose not to select graduate programs. During my faculty experience at an HBCU, I was the program director for approximately a year and six months. As the program director, I was not only responsible for the department, but also promoting diversity as a part of the programs strategic plan. The desire to see an increase of Blacks within this graduate program became of great personal interest. During this time, I experienced several qualified, Black students apply, interview, and be selected; however, each one of them turned down the opportunity and chose to attend a PWI counterpart with the same graduate program. Being aware of these potential biases I was able to effectively bracket them to seek the truth of the gathered data from the student experiences.

Researcher's Role

My role as a human instrument in this qualitative study, was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. My role in this study was correlated to the phenomenon of students choosing to transition to PWIs for graduate school. I am a Black female who worked within an HBCU graduate program that often seek HBCU undergraduate students to transition to my master's level program. My previous position in higher education may impact how I view the data as it will be easy to apply the findings to why students may not apply to our program. My desire for program prosperity, growth of HBCUs, and my love for all students, especially those who have more disadvantages (i.e., minorities) may have also impacted how I view the data. The findings gave me insight as to how I could learn from the students to increase the success of our program.

I was within the field to build rapport and collect data byway of interviews. I did not have authority over participants and/or push them to participate. The potential bias or assumptions I brought as a human instrument was my own experience at HBCUs and pre-assumptions as to why students chose to leave or remain within the university. My role was not to interpret, but to gather the data of the experience of each student to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. As the human instrument, I observed, conducted interviews, and spoke to the participants. I also transcribed the data, composed into common themes, and inputted into a qualitative software to be analyzed. Lastly, I was responsible for displaying basic demographics in tables and completing the discussion of the findings.

Procedures

Prior to collecting any data and making any contact with potential participants, I sought approval from Liberty University's institutional review board (IRB approval letter; see Appendix A). Once IRB was obtained, I used convenience sampling to recruit participants from the Southeastern region through social media messenger, LinkedIn, and personal connections (Recruitment statement; see Appendix B). Following convenience, I used snowball sampling to maximize the sample population. The recruitment statement also included the screening survey link to the screening form using Google Forms, which collected participant emails as well. If they were interested in participating, they were instructed to click the link to complete the surveys within one week of receiving the invite. The form also instructed them to complete the consent letter and calendar link. After I received the screening surveys, I reviewed each survey to confirm they met the inclusionary criteria to participate and then sent the consent form attachment and a calendar link to <https://www.when2meet.com/> (Consent form; see Appendix C). I instructed qualified participants to sign the consent form manually or electronically. They

were also instructed to complete the calendar link with their availability within two weeks for the focus group and for individual interviews. After assessing the available time slots, I set a date for the focus group and individual interviews and sent it out via Zoom invites. The focus groups took place via a Zoom platform (Focus group protocol; see Appendix D). After data was obtained from the focus groups, I conducted the individual semi-structured interviews (Interview protocol; see Appendix E). The interviews were recorded and transcribed using Zoom, reviewed, and then analyzed for common themes. Lastly, participants were asked to record short videos of advice to Black students attending HBCUs as undergraduates who have the desire to pursue graduate degrees (Video prompt; see Appendix F).

Permissions

After IRB approval was granted from the Liberty University IRB, I proceeded with collecting data. Site permission was not necessary for this study as it involved a variety of individuals who attended a PWI or recently attended; therefore, the university itself was not a part of the study. I recruited graduate students using Facebook messenger, LinkedIn, contact numbers, and word of mouth to obtain their permission. Students who were interested in participating responded to the contact by completing the screening surveys within one week. Consent forms were emailed along with the When 2 Meet link for focus group and individual interview time slots to all eligible participants. Consent forms were either manually or electronically signed and returned within two weeks along with completion of the time slots. Lastly, permission to record students was sent with the consent form. Audio recordings were used for the focus groups, individual interviews, and advice recordings for transcribing purposes and to ensure all responses were captured.

Recruitment Plan

A sample size in a phenomenological study typically ranges from 3 to 15 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, there were 10 participants who were graduates of an HBCU and either currently attending a PWI for graduate school or were recent graduates (within one year) of a graduate level, PWI program. Potential students were initially selected from a variety of PWIs using convenience and then snowball sampling. I continued recruiting participants until I obtained at least ten participants or thematic saturation was met (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Graduate students between the ages of 22 and 40 attending a PWI with an undergraduate degree from an HBCU were chosen for this study as they met the inclusionary criteria for the study. Potential students were required to meet all the inclusionary criteria to participate. Demographic data obtained from initial screening are displayed in a table to include age, gender, institution, and degree (See Table 1). There was a variation in age, gender, institution, classification, and degree of study. A pseudonym was given to each participant and their sites to protect confidentiality.

Data Collection Plan

To gain the perspectives of graduates from HBCUs who transitioned to PWIs for graduate school, I administered two focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and a video of advice. The focus groups with all participants were conducted using an online platform, Zoom. This offered an opportunity to build rapport and allowed everyone to feed off each other in a safe, facilitated environment before individual interviews. Choosing to implement the focus groups before the individual interviews also allowed participants the opportunity to ease into the study, meet me, and meet others. Interviews followed the focus groups and students were able to further

elaborate on their experiences. Lastly, students were asked to record a brief video of advice to a Black, undergraduate student attending an HBCU and interested in graduate studies.

This section discusses each data collection method, analysis plan, trustworthiness, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations.

Focus Group Data Collection Approach

Focus groups with the qualified participants were conducted using the Zoom platform. The focus groups aided with triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interaction between participants provided rich, thick descriptions of the experiences with the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Data gathered using focus groups utilized the same participants of the interview process (Krueger & Casey, 2014). This aided in improving credibility for the research (Krueger & Casey, 2014). I sent out a calendar invite for each participant to select time options that would work for their schedule. Not all participants responded to the calendar invite; therefore, I chose a time slot based on the four participants availability. Due to the participant scheduling, I offered two different days for the focus groups to take place by way of Zoom. Four participants participated in the first focus group and the other six participated in the second focus group selected the time slot that worked best for everyone and scheduled the meeting date by way of a Zoom invite with the link. On the day of the focus group, students were encouraged to turn on their cameras; however, this was not required. The purpose offered an opportunity for building rapport with me as the researcher, as well as, allowing an opportunity for an open forum with questions and answers. Questions were not directed at any individual person, instead it was an open forum format where anyone could chime in at any time. Everyone was encouraged to respond to questions. Beginning the data collection with the focus group also allowed students an introduction to the study and possibly took some stress off the individual interviews. The focus

groups were recorded using the Zoom app transcription feature. Students were made aware of the recording and signed the informed consent for participation and agreement of being recorded prior to collecting data. I analyzed and transcribed the responses. The first focus group took approximately 30 minutes, and the second focus group took approximately 1 hour.

Focus Group Questions

1. Please share with everyone where you are from and the degree you're currently seeking (Ask students not to share HBCU/PWI institution name for confidentiality). (CRQ)
2. Why did you choose to attend an HBCU for your undergraduate degree? (CRQ)
3. Based on your experiences, what do you feel are important factors when choosing a HBCU/PWI? (CRQ, SQ2)
4. Describe what your PWI program offers that may be more/less valuable than what you received at the HBCU? (SQ1, SQ2)
5. If you had the opportunity to do it all over again, explain if would you make the same decision and why (go to the HBCU for undergrad and PWI for grad)? (CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2)

The focus group questions correlated to the problem that Black, HBCU undergraduate students leave their alma mater to transition to PWIs for graduate school. Questions one was a demographic/background question meant to ease everyone into the focus group, increase comfort levels, and identify characteristics of the persons in the focus group. The questions also related to the purpose of this study, exploring the lived experiences of Black graduate school students who transitioned from their alma mater HBCU to a PWI graduate school. These thought-provoking, focus group questions expounded on what motivated the participants to make the decisions they made and gain a greater understanding of their motivations to transition. Lastly, the focus group

questions aided in answering the central research question and sub questions. Question two focused on what motivating factors influenced the students to attend an HBCU for their undergraduate degree. Question three inquired what the students feel are important components to assess when choosing a HBCU or PWI. Question four highlighted the differences in value between HBCUs and PWIs. Lastly, question five identified if students would choose to make the same selections again. The focus group questions served as a foundation to build upon during the individual interviews.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The initial step in phenomenological data analysis was epoché (Moustakas, 1994). Epoché is a Greek term that means to put off judgment (Moustakas, 1994). I made my preconceived opinions, judgments, and prejudices evident, then set them aside to be more sensitive to the participants' perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). I completed this epoché through reflective meditation, which entailed allowing my preconceptions and prejudgments to freely enter and exit my mind until I felt satisfied and free of the thoughts (Moustakas, 1994). These thoughts were bracketed throughout the research process using journaling (Sample Transcript Bracketing; see Appendix G).

Following epoché, I retrieved the focus group data transcription from the Zoom app and reviewed it for accuracy in comparison with the Zoom recording. After familiarizing and reviewing for accuracy and allowing the participants to review for accuracy, I uploaded the transcriptions to MAXQDA software to organize and store the data to begin analyzing. This software program aided in systematically evaluating and interpreting the qualitative texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After uploading the transcriptions, I examined each of the participants statements and identified significant statements focusing on how the participants experienced the

phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Using the horizontalization process, I treated every statement with the same value, eliminate statements that overlap, and any irrelevant statements that do not relate to the research questions. The horizons found were coded into themes (Moustakas, 1994). The theme refers to a frequently used word or phrase that aided in discovering similar themes among the participant, adding to a descriptive analysis of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). A thematic analysis was appropriate as it describes an iterative process depicting how to take a group of unstructured data and turn it into important themes (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Thematic analysis shifts away from displaying facts and instead focuses on the meaning people attribute to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following coding, textural descriptions were examined and a composite of textural descriptions were condensed into summary formats (Moustakas, 1994). Textural descriptions focused on *the what* of the phenomenon and be used to state specific quotes from the participants to further enhance description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). After determining the textural descriptions of the phenomenon, imaginative variation led me to write structural descriptions of *how* the experiences of each participant came to be in the context of time, space, causality, relation to self, or relation to others, based on the textural descriptions obtained through transcendental phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). This process was done for each participant and then developed into a description that describes the essence of the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

Following the focus groups, semi-structured interviews with the qualifying participants were conducted. An interview is a social interaction by way of conversation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each graduate student was asked open-ended questions to gain insight into their HBCU experience and the motivating factors that caused them to transition to a PWI for a

graduate program. The interviews were conducted one-on-one by way of Zoom and participants were encouraged to engage in a quiet space at the participant's convenience. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the questions included what situations have influenced their experiences and what things they have experienced in relation to the phenomenon.

The interview protocol was the core point of gathering data, while inviting the participants to open and share their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocol also aided in taking notes during the interview and organizing thoughts well (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While conducting each interview, the Zoom feature of transcribing was used simultaneously to capture each response by way of recording and transcribing. Each individual interview took approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Using the interview questions, I was able to answer the research questions: What are the factors that motivated Black HBCU, graduate students to transition to a PWI for graduate school? (CRQ), what inhibited HBCU undergraduate students to not return to their alma mater for graduate school? (SQ1), what motivated HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school? (SQ2)

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please tell me your name, undergraduate institution, and graduate institution and your reasons for going to graduate school.
2. Explain the reasons you chose to attend an HBCU for your undergraduate experience. (CRQ)
3. Explain the factors that caused you not to stay at your HBCU alma mater for graduate school. (SQ1)
4. Explain what may have motivated you to transition to a PWI. (SQ2)

5. Describe what things worked better for you at the HBCU in comparison to the PWI.
(CRQ)
6. Explain your relationship with faculty at the HBCU in comparison to the PWI (Positive and/or negative). (CRQ)
7. Explain if you have experienced any racial issues during your undergraduate or graduate experience. (CRQ, SQ1)
8. Explain how prepared and equipped you felt to get hired and be successful after graduating from your HBCU alma mater. (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
9. Explain your sense of belonging at your HBCU alma mater in comparison to your PWI.
(CRQ)
10. Explain your experiences with the resources offered at your HBCU in comparison to your PWI. (CRQ)
11. Explain the differences between your relationship with your classmates/peers at both HBCU and PWI. (CRQ)
12. Explain the differences between the institutional departments' customer service at both your HBCU and PWI (i.e., financial aid department, admissions, etc.). (CRQ)
13. Explain how your PWI met or is meeting your expectations as a graduate student. (SQ2)
14. What regrets, if any, do you have for not returning to your HBCU alma mater for your graduate degree. (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
15. Describe any additional facts you would like to share that you have not yet shared based on your experiences at either HBCU and/or PWI. (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

The interview questions correlated to the problem that Black, HBCU undergraduate students leave their alma mater to transition to PWIs for graduate school. Questions 1-3

focused on the student explaining what factors caused them to choose an HBCU, not return to their HBCU alma mater for graduate school, and why they chose to attend a PWI. Questions 4-13 required students to explain different aspects of their experiences at both their HBCU and PWI. Question 14 inquired about any regrets they may have for not returning their HBCU alma mater and question 15 offered the students the opportunity to offer any additional information they would like to share regarding their experience. To gain the perspectives of Black, graduate students, I administered interviews using Zoom. Following the initial survey, semi-structured interviews with the qualifying participants will be conducted. The interview protocol was the core point of gathering data, while inviting the interviewees to open and share their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocol also aided in taking notes during the interview and organizing thoughts well (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018), recommend using microphone equipment to assist with collecting adequate data. According to Khan and MacEachen (2022), one of the primary benefits of recording an interview is the ability to focus on the actual interview itself rather than taking notes which can easily distract the researcher and the persons interviewing.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Like the data analysis plan for the focus group, the first step in analyzing the interviews was putting aside my preconceived thoughts, judgements, and perceptions using epoché (Moustakas, 1994). This was completed using reflective meditation and bracketing by journaling my own experiences and thoughts throughout the process. After reflection and bracketing through journaling, I retrieved each individual interview transcription from the Zoom app and reviewed it for accuracy in comparison with the Zoom recording. I also allowed each participant to review their individual transcripts for accuracy. After familiarizing and ensuring the

transcriptions were accurate, I uploaded the transcriptions to MAXQDA software to organize and store the data. After uploading the transcriptions, I examined each of the participants statements and identified significant statements focusing on how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I eliminated statements that are irrelevant to the research questions or overlapping using horizontalization. Through horizontalization, I also treated every significant statement with the same value (Moustakas, 1994). I used a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is appropriate as it describes an iterative process depicting how to take a group of unstructured data and turn it into important themes (Braun & Clarke, 2020). I then assigned preliminary codes to the horizons to describe the content (Moustakas, 1994). Following coding, textural descriptions were examined and a composite of textural descriptions was condensed into summary formats (Moustakas, 1994).

After determining the common themes and patterns amongst the interview responses, imaginative variation led me to write structural descriptions of how the experiences of each participant came to be in the context of time, space, causality, relation to self, or relation to others, based on the textural descriptions obtained through transcendental phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). This process was done for each participant and then developed into a narrative description that describes the essence of the phenomenon experienced by each participant (Moustakas, 1994).

Video Data Collection Approach

Video recording was the last data collection approach from the participants following interviews. Video recording is an alternative to journal prompts and can enrich participant perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The collected data was used to complement the focus group and interviews, enriching the participants perspectives being offered and allowing them

the additional opportunity to provide information about their experiences. Participants were asked to record a short video giving advice to an undergraduate student at an HBCU seeking to enroll in graduate school. Participants were encouraged to record no longer than 2 minutes. The prompt stated: “As a Black, HBCU graduate and PWI graduate student, what would you tell a Black, undergraduate student currently attending a HBCU and interested in graduate school?” The information collected from the video highlighted the culmination of the student’s perspective based on their experience and what advice they would offer others. Participants were given two weeks to compose and submit a video via a designated Google folder that will only be assessed by myself and the individual participant.

Video Data Analysis Plan

I implemented a narrative analysis to examine the content of the video data. A narrative analysis is beneficial as it involves the reformulation of stories told by the participants and considering the context and different experiences (Dudovskiy, 2022). After completing and receiving the videos, I uploaded each video to MAXQDA. The software transcribed each video and I reviewed for accuracy and understanding. I also sent each transcription to the participation to ensure saturation is met. Following familiarization, responses were condensed into summary formats and coded into common themes. The data was then be triangulated with other collection methods and written in narrative form to display the essence of the shared phenomenon.

Data Synthesis

Data analysis followed the steps for transcendental phenomenology and phenomenological reduction as explained by Moustakas (1994). Statements irrelevant to the research questions or overlapping were eliminated. Following coding, textural descriptions were examined and a composite of textural descriptions were condensed into summary formats

(Moustakas, 1994). After determining the textural descriptions of the phenomenon, imaginative variation led me to write structural descriptions of how the experiences of each participant came to be in the context of time, space, causality, relation to self, or relation to others, based on the textural descriptions obtained through transcendental phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). The textural and structural descriptions were integrated into composite descriptions to display the essence of the phenomenon in narrative form. Themes were presented and then each research question was summarized (Data Analysis Table; see Appendix H).

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) focused on using alternative terms in relation to application of realistic truisms. This section provides insight into the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept. This section highlights steps to increase the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study's findings.

Credibility

Credibility refers to confidence in the truth of the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility focuses on establishing that the findings represent plausible information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It helps to ensure that the researcher's representation of the data is accurate and appropriately reflects the participants' views (Patton, 2015). I achieved credibility in three ways: (a) member checking, (b) triangulation, and (c) and peer debriefing.

Member Checking

In this study, I shared the same experiences and transitions as the participants when making the decision to transfer or remain at their alma mater for graduate school. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher having similar experiences can be an advantage. I used member checking to solicit the views of participants of credibility and their interpretations of

their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was done by allowing the participants to review and/or confirm the concepts being transcribed by asking questions from different perspectives to ensure the accurate experience was captured. Necessary aspects of the transcription were clarified with the participants to ensure it is accurately recorded. To further member check, copies of transcriptions and the final representation of the findings were sent to each willing participant for accuracy via email.

Triangulation

Triangulation aided in locating any discrepancies inside the data that could potentially invalidate the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Triangulation also aided me in being aware of any contradictions that could be harmful to the research. I used three different methods of data collection: focus groups, interviews, and videos. I also used different sources and methods to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2018). Lastly, triangulation was used when developing themes from the data collected and no discrepancy was determined. Each participant shared consistent experiences during all data collection methods. The combination of the data collection methods gave a holistic view of each participant, as well as, how they relate to each other, and the shared experience of the phenomenon. Similarities were found across all three methods of data collection, and nothing stood out amongst the data.

Peer Debriefing

A method used throughout this study was peer debriefing. This technique allowed me to discuss any developing findings with my colleagues to ensure the analyses are grounded in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I had access to both undergraduate and graduate faculty members, in addition to available literature that can corroborate the findings. Selection of faculty members

was based on their experiences with students interested in remaining within HBCUs for graduate school and those who have transitioned to PWIs.

Transferability

Transferability indicates that the findings may have pertinence in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is largely achieved using thick descriptions when describing research findings (Geertz, 2008). The descriptions used to describe student experiences at HBCUs painted a robust picture of what either motivates or inhibits their decision to transfer to PWIs for graduate school. The results created the conditions for transferability, but this transferability was not guaranteed. The results were only specific for the selected participants and their selective undergraduate HBCUs and current PWIs chosen for this study. While studying the specificities of the chosen past HBCUs and current PWIs may not demonstrate transferability of findings, the literature offered further insight regarding why these transitions are being made. In addition, I sought maximum variation in my sample population to increase transferability including different HBCU and PWI institutions, majors, ages, and cross section of gender.

Dependability

Dependability was indicated by the findings being consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research was audited during the review process by the dissertation committee and the director of qualitative research. Descriptions of the procedures are clear enough to be replicated in other studies. Dependability was also accomplished through an inquiry audit, which at Liberty University occurs with a thorough review of the process and the products of the research by the dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director. In addition, the data collection process was followed exactly each time to ensure the approach is replicable.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I incorporated three techniques to ensure confirmability was reached. Audit trails were used so that the procedures, data, and analysis of the data can be clearly tracked. Confirmability audits were implemented and confirmed by the research team. The reliability and validity of the research study was determined by overlapping methods of the focus group, interviews, and videos (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Lastly, reflexivity was incorporated by acknowledging my role in the research. This was done by memoing following interviews (Memoing; see Appendix I).

Ethical Considerations

This study was not conducted until approval was received by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. All gathered data was kept confidential, and any information shared was in aggregate form. No information was discussed or shared with anyone other than the researcher and the research committee. Any data shared remained secure while in the committee's possession using encrypted electronic passwords. I used pseudonyms to de-identify any personal information. Each pseudonym remained with the participants and the list was stored separately from the results. No information was printed. All completed forms and surveys were kept in an electronic file with password protection. Data is secured on a password-protected computer. The computer is stored in a locked office accessed by the researcher. Additionally, individual data files were also password protected to provide greater security for participant information. All data collected will be destroyed after three years. The informed consent documents were completed following initial screening. After obtaining the consent forms, the forms were placed in a designated electronic folder that is password protected.

There was little to no risks to the participants. Risks and benefits to the participants was discussed during the explanation of the consent form. The first potential risk is a breach of confidential information. There was also risk of experiencing psychological stress from reliving past experiences. I implemented the following precautions to avoid this risk: I obtained participant signed consent to participate in the research study. I placed all research materials and related data in secure locations to ensure the information is securely protected from unauthorized access and or use. I utilized my locked office, a locked file cabinet, and a password-protected computer to secure research materials and related data. A folder was created for all collected data and was uploaded within my locked office on a password protected computer. I encouraged everyone participating in the focus group to avoid sharing information outside of the focus group and avoid sharing names and school names. I allowed time to regroup as needed, monitor participants, and/or discontinue or reschedule interviews if needed if any psychological stress arises. I limited direct access to participant information to myself and my research committee. Any disseminated information was in aggregate form. The collected data will be electronically deleted after three years. It was explained that participation is voluntary, and anyone can opt out at any time with no penalty.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of graduate students from an HBCU who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school. The method for this study was qualitative. The phenomenon was student experiences at an HBCU that motivated them to transition to other universities for graduate school. The purpose of Chapter Three was to explain the methods that were used to answer the investigation questions presented from this research study. The research was conducted using an online platform with 10 graduate students.

This study is critical to research and aids in gaining a foundation to assist in determining possible solutions at HBCU graduate programs to obtain undergraduate students from the undergraduate programs.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of Black HBCU graduates who chose to transition to a PWI for graduate school. In this study, I sought to identify the perceptions of Black HBCU graduates and why they chose to leave their HBCU alma mater for PWI institutions. The central research question was: What are the experiences of Black HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school? The sub-questions were: Sub-Question 1: What factors inhibited HBCU graduates from returning to their alma mater for graduate school? Sub-Question 2: What factors motivated HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school? This chapter includes a description of the participants, narrative data presented in common themes, and participant responses to the research questions.

Participants

This study's participants consisted of ten Black, HBCU graduates who were attending a PWI for a graduate degree or recently graduated from a PWI with their graduate degree within a year. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 34 years of age. Three of the ten students recently graduated from a PWI with their master's degree or a doctoral degree. All participants attended their HBCU institution within the southeastern region. Each participant completed a screening survey that collected demographic information. See Table 1 for student participant demographics and a description for each participant in the following sections.

Table 1*Student Participants*

Student Participant	Gender	Age Range	HBCU	HBCU Major	PWI Graduate or Student
Rose	F	29-34	American	Social Work	Graduate
Stephen	M	29-34	Cobblestone	Computer Science	Student
Ashley	F	22-28	Cobblestone	Psychology & Biology	Student
Denice	F	22-28	American	Rehabilitation	Graduate
Tina	F	29-34	Mountain	Political Science	Student
Walter	M	22-28	University	Mechanical	Student
Corey	M	22-28	Brinkley	Biological Engineering	Student
Tasha	F	22-28	American	Human Centered Design & Engineering	Student
Lakeyn	F	29-34	Langly	Rehabilitation	Student
Makayla	F	22-28	Charleston	Biomedical Sciences	Graduate

Rose

Rose is a Black female, in the 29-34 age group, who completed her bachelor's degree in social work from American University. Rose is a recent graduate with her master's degree in human resource management. Rose explained she was offered a job after completing her

internship during her HBCU experience. Rose stated, “I had a year of internship with the same job that I was hired onto right after getting my bachelor’s degree.” Rose went on to further explain how she felt well-prepared by her HBCU as she stated, “I don’t have any regrets.” “It was the best experience ever.”

Stephen

Stephen is a Black male, in the 29-34 age range. He graduated from Cobblestone University with a bachelor’s degree in computer science. Stephen is currently enrolled in a PWI for his master’s degree in computer science and is on track to graduate December 2024. Stephen expressed that he would make the same decision of attending his HBCU and current PWI again if given the opportunity. Stephen also expressed, “I felt like on a scale of 10, I would give a 10,” when describing how his HBCU prepared him for his future.

Ashley

Ashley is a Black female, in the 22-28 age range. She is an HBCU graduate from Cobblestone University with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and biology minor. Ashley is currently enrolled in a PWI for her entry-level, clinical doctoral degree in occupational therapy. She is on track to graduate in 2024. Ashley stated, “I wouldn’t change my experiences for the world” when discussing if she would make the same decisions of choosing her HBCU institution and PWI again. She further explained, “had they had my degree of interest, I would’ve stayed.”

Denice

Denice is a Black female, in the age range of 22-28. She is a graduate of American University with a bachelor’s degree in rehabilitation. Denice is also a recent graduate of a PWI with her clinical doctorate in occupational therapy. She stated, “I was definitely well-prepared by my HBCU and my PWI and I would choose them both again.” Denice went on to say, “I don’t

have any regrets of leaving my HBCU for my PWI because of the opportunities it gave me.”

Denice is now working in her profession as an occupational therapist.

Tina

Tina is a Black female, in the age range of 29-34. She is an HBCU graduate from Mountain University with her bachelor's in political science. She is currently enrolled in a PWI for her Master of Science in history and sociology of technology and science. Tina expressed she would make the same decision of choosing her HBCU and PWI as she did. In terms of feeling prepared by her HBCU, she stated “I'd say, like an 8 out of 10.” “I would still choose them again,” she said.

Walter

Walter is a Black male between the ages of 22-28 years old. He is a graduate of University with a degree in mechanical engineering. Walter is a recent graduate with his master's in aerospace, aeronautical and astronautical engineering. He suggested, “I wish my HBCU had more to offer, but I don't regret starting off there.” Walter also spoke about how his HBCU was the bridge that led to his continued pursuit of space engineering.

Corey

Corey is a Black male between the ages of 22-28 years old. Corey is a graduate of Brinkley University with a bachelor's degree in biological engineering. He is currently a graduate level student seeking his biological systems, engineering degree at a PWI. Corey spoke on how he enjoyed his HBCU experience and how they prepared him well for his future. He suggested, “although not perfect, I'd still choose my HBCU any day of the week and not think twice about it.”

Tasha

Tasha is a Black female in the age range of 22-28 years old. Tasha graduated from American University with her bachelor's degree in human centered design and engineering. She is currently attending a PWI to obtain her master's in human centered computing. Tasha indicated that because of the support she received from her HBCU classmates and faculty, she would choose them again. "I regret nothing about either decision," Tasha stated.

Lakeyn

Lakeyn is a Black female between the ages of 29-34. She is a graduate of Langley University with a degree in rehabilitation and a current graduate student. She is seeking her clinical doctorate degree at a PWI in physical therapy. Lakeyn indicated that although she is enjoying her PWI experience, she would have chosen her HBCU again if it was a feasible option.

Makayla

Makayla is a Black female between the ages of 22-28. She is a graduate of Charleston University with her bachelor's degree in biomedical sciences. She is a recent graduate of a PWI with a master's in biomedical sciences. Makayla suggested her experiences at both the HBCU and PWI were undeniably impactful, and she attributed her accomplishments to God. She stated, "choosing my HBCU and leaving their to go to my PWI was by far the best experience and path God could have sent me on." Makayla spoke very highly of her experiences and insisted she had no regrets.

Results

This study was guided by one central research question and two sub-questions to describe the perceptions of Black HBCU graduates who chose to transition to a PWI for graduate school.

Participants completed a screening form, participated in a focus group, shared their personal experiences during semi-structured interviews, and recorded videos of advice to Black HBCU undergraduate students interested in transitioning to graduate programs. The significant themes of their shared experiences, as they relate to the sub research questions are presented (see Table 2). Narrative descriptions further highlight the common themes (Significant statements; see Appendix J).

Table 2

Major Themes and Sub-themes

Major Themes	Sub-themes
<i>Institutional Offerings</i>	Varying Degree Opportunities Location Research and Outreach Opportunities
<i>Programmatic Academic Offerings</i>	Program Schedule Flexibility Course Delivery Method Options Programmatic Resource Access
<i>Social Relationships and Interactions</i>	Peer and Faculty Connections Cultural Sense of Belonging Racial Issues and Biases Customer Service

Institutional Offerings

The first theme of institutional offerings arose from the participants' discussing the different opportunities provided by their PWI in comparison to their HBCU. Although participants mentioned HBCUs costing more and less opportunities presented for scholarships in comparison to PWIs, some PWIs were said to have a myriad of opportunities at a lower price. Participants revealed that their PWIs offered more opportunities such as degree options, location, and research. The participants suggested that the opportunities at the PWI greatly impacted their decision-making when choosing which institution to attend for graduate school. Rose stated in her advice video and focus group, "PWIs may offer a wider range of what you want to do."

Varying Degree Opportunities

The opportunity to choose from varying degrees at PWIs was one contributing factor shared amongst the participants. Participants discussed in the focus group, interviews, and advice videos how they had no choice but to transition to a PWI due to the degree limitations at their HBCU alma mater. Garrett (2015) mentioned how students leave HBCUs for more diversified learning environments and opportunities. For instance, during the focus group and video of advice, Rose stated, "choosing the institution definitely depends on your needs and the program you're interested in because certain HBCUs might not provide ongoing programs to transition from undergrad to graduate school." In addition, during the focus group, Tasha agreed with Rose commenting, "I agree, my HBCU did not have my graduate degree either." During the focus group and interview, Ashley went on to mention "my HBCU did not even offer graduate degrees, so I really had no choice but to leave." Corey offered in his video of advice "your degree of choice matters." Lastly, Lakeyn and Tina both mentioned they'd wish their HBCUs had their degree of choice as an option for graduate school.

Location

The location of the institution was another commonality found amongst the group. Participants discussed the need to leave their HBCU alma mater for another institution due to the desire to be closer to personal elements such as home and family. For these participants, not only did the PWIs have their desired degrees, but the locations were favorable. In addition, some of the PWIs discussed offered different campus locations, unlike the HBCUs. Denice mentioned in her interview, “moving back home to attend graduate school allowed me to save so much money with housing and additional expenses.” It was also stated by Stephen and Makayla, that their PWI was in a better environment in comparison to his HBCU alma mater. During the interview and focus group Walter stated, “I didn’t have to worry about hearing about incidents happening on campus at my PWI.” Walter suggested experiencing a high occurrence of violence at crime around his HBCU. Walter went on to say,

My HBCU was in a neighborhood that had a lot of poverty and low-income housing like Section A apartments. So, we often witnessed a lot of crime like break-ins, rape, domestic violence, and other stuff that you shouldn’t have to deal with going to school. Everything including the school needed to be torn down and rebuilt. It was really an experience I won’t forget; yet, grateful for witnessing.

Research and Outreach Opportunities

HBCUs are known for providing society with invaluable scholars and researchers (Johnson et al., 2017); however, the participants of this study suggested during the focus group, interviews, and videos of advice that PWIs gave them more research opportunities, programs, and community outreach events. Although they enjoyed their HBCU experiences, they emphasized how their PWIs provided them with more opportunities. In her interview and video

of advice, Makayla stated “The outreach and networking opportunities motivated me to go to my PWI.” During the interview Denice stated, “I was able to participate in an outreach program where I served as a research student for two of my undergraduate years under the direction of the PWI graduate school chair.” In the focus group Tasha commented, “I enjoyed the little research groups we had at my HBCU, but my PWI has further enhanced my knowledge of research and how far it could go.”

Programmatic Academic Offerings

The second common theme found was programmatic academic offerings. Participants highlighted that their PWI programs offered more flexibility for program scheduling during the focus group, interviews, and advice videos. Although White administrators often lack sensitivity pertaining to educational needs and safety of Black students, they still entice students to come due to their flexible opportunities (Bracey, 2017). The participants also expressed how they had more options regarding the method in which their courses were delivered such as online and hybrid formats. Lastly, participants suggested having more resources within their individualized programs to use when needed at PWIs in comparison to their HBCUs. During her interview, Makayla stated, “I feel like my HBCU prepared me as best they could based on the level of resources they had.”

Program Schedule Flexibility

Participants spoke of having the opportunity to take advantage of fast-track programs during their undergraduate degree that correlated to the graduate program offered by the PWIs. For example, Ashley stated in the focus group, “I was able to do three years undergrad and two years in the grad program.” Participants also reported being able to work during their graduate programs, because of the class times and/or asynchronous scheduling of courses. Corey indicated

during the focus group, “In undergrad, there were only one or two choices so that flexibility just wasn’t there to also be able to work full-time; but, my PWI had their program set up to be able to also work full-time with less stress.” Lakeyn stated in her video of advice, “Knowing what is going to best fit your schedule before you start school is important.” Tasha stated in her video of advice to align what you need with what the school provides when trying to choose where to go.

Course Delivery Method Options

Participants linked having program flexibility to the different course delivery method options provided by their PWIs. Ashley and Rose discussed during the focus group how their PWI offered different tracks such as traditional, flex, hybrid, and fully online. During her interview, Tasha expressed how she was able to work full time while in her graduate program due to the hybrid schedule and online options offered. Stephen stated, “no other HBCU offered me an online program opportunity.” Corey mentioned in his advice video,

I’d say ask around, because my PWI was much more organized than my HBCU with their courses. If you need to work or do things outside of school, you may want to look into online or hybrid opportunities. Choosing a school with online or hybrid options will give you the opportunity to live life outside of school. We all have stuff to do so having that flexibility makes things a little less stressful.

Programmatic Resource Access

The participants discussed the differences of resources provided by their HBCUs and PWIs. Participants mentioned they are provided with quality education and quality resources such as library resources and operating computers and printers at their PWIs. Rose stated during the focus group, “My PWI had better resources.” Stephen also reported during the focus group “I always had difficulty accessing the resources that were suggested to be available for the students

at my HBCU.” Ashley stated during her interview, “I feel like the resources at my HBCU were more hidden.” Lastly, participants mentioned the lack of library resources available to them as well. During the interview, Makayla stated she chose to go to her PWI because of the quality education and resources. In her video of advice, Makayla commented,

Make sure you look at the resources offered when choosing where you want to go. My HBCU had enough resources to get us through, but my PWI definitely had more. Then the resources my HBCU did have sometimes didn’t work or there wasn’t enough to go around for everybody.

These experiences can be commonplace at HBCU’s due to the historic marginalization of these institutions and never having enough or as many resources and financial support as Predominantly White Institutions (Britton et al., 2022; Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Winkle-Wagner, 2019).

Social Relationships and Interactions

Although the participants expressed having decent relationships with both peer and faculty at their HBCUs and PWIs, their connections at their HBCUs were more favorable. PWIs have made tremendous strides towards correcting their past with transgressions; however, Black and White connections are not automatic (McClain, 2017). During the focus group, Makayla stated, “My undergraduate school was just different. . . . I had more people that looked like me and we related on many levels in comparison to my PWI peers.” In the focus group Ashley added, “I agree, in my PWI graduate school, I only relate with my peers regarding the courses and what we need to study.” Experiencing attitudes with institutional departments such as financial aid and admissions were commonalities across the experiences of the participants; however, they mentioned it being a common thing in the Black population that they were used

to. Many suggested getting the “run-around” and/or being able to not reach departments dealing with student affairs at their HBCU campuses.

Peer and Faculty Connections

Some participants stated how their HBCU faculty were not exactly great at teaching their course material; however, they still had a stronger connection with their HBCU peers and faculty. Johnson (2019) discussed how Black students who have limited engagement with other students of the same ethnicity is what pushes students to attend HBCUs for graduate school. This compares to reasons why some of the participants first chose the HBCU for their undergraduate degrees; however, peer connections did not motivate them to remain within the institution for their graduate degrees. Many of the participants stated they had either a greater connection with their HBCU peers in comparison to their PWI peers; however, some also mentioned they had good connections with both HBCU and PWI peers. For instance, during the focus group Stephen stated,

My HBCU peers and I just looked out for each other. It wasn't you against me or I'm better than you type of situation. We all simply cared about one another and wanted all of us to win. Now at my PWI, that's a different story. It's like everyone isn't really genuine. My classmates will also throw you under the bus real quick and won't think twice about it. So, I still keep in touch with my HBCU peers to this day.

In the focus group, Stephen stated, “My professors at my HBCU felt like an uncle or aunt.” Lakeyn indicated how her HBCU advisors and faculty were more nurturing in her interview. In addition, the participants discussed all still having some kind of connection with their HBCU peers and faculty. Makayla stated in the focus group, I still have a better connection with my peers and faculty from my undergraduate experience, than with my graduate

connections.” She went on to say during her interview, “I feel like I needed my PWI professors more because of the course difficulty; however, I had a more personal connection with my HBCU professors.”

Cultural Sense of Belonging

Although HBCUs had the most welcoming environment for the participants, they mostly still felt like they belong at their PWIs as well. In her interview Makayla stated, “I felt comfortable and like I belonged in both settings.” She further explained, “I grew up in a predominantly White area, so I went to high school with mainly White people.” This contrasts with Johnson’s (2019) findings that students who attended predominantly White high schools experienced racial isolation contributing to their desire to attend an HBCU for their undergraduate degrees and graduate degrees. The psychological well-being such as having a positive self-image is much greater at HBCUs than for Black students attending PWIs (Fleming, 1984). Rose stated during the focus group, “Ah for me, it was the culture for sure at my HBCU.” “I visited and it felt like home and I felt like I was in the neighborhood.” Tatum (2017) found that Black students often seek out one another to find physical places of refuge and comfort with those who share the same racial identity. During the interview, Ashley stated she was more comfortable at the HBCU with more Black people walking around and hearing music. Additionally, in the focus group and his video of advice, Corey mentioned “Culture is what he most enjoyed and appreciated about his HBCU.” These findings are congruent with Williams (2018), in which it was stated that HBCU campus culture provides students with the opportunity to assess themselves and their cultural, societal, and professional values.

Racial Issues and Biases

Although many of the participants expressed not having many students of color in their PWI programs, only a few of them experienced a degree of racism and/or bias by faculty or peers. Garrett (2015) mentioned Blacks often experience racism at PWIs which can be overwhelming, however, when asked did she experience any racial comments, biases, or other offensive experiences while at either the HBCU or PWI, Makayla commented,

Thankfully, no. I did witness a White student commenting on the restaurant Cracker Barrel in a car full of Black people. The girl asked did we know why it's called that and when she talked it linked to things of slavery. The girl didn't even realize how untactful and ridiculous she'd sounded.

According to Engram's (2019) qualitative study, many PWIs fail to provide all-inclusive atmospheres that are conducive to everyone's learning. Rose stated during the focus group, "I didn't have any racial issues at neither my HBCU nor PWI. I think because I was solely online at my PWI with no picture, I didn't have to worry about any negative encounters." Ashley mentioned, "For whatever reason, my class is mixed at my PWI; however, we tend to segregate when we aren't placed in groups, but I don't know why we automatically do that." Corey stated during his interview, "I had to deal with the White boys thinking they were better than me, but at my HBCU everyone looked like me, so I didn't have any problems there."

Customer Service

The participants mentioned how customer service was overall much more pleasant at PWIs than at HBCUs. Several of the participants discussed how they have had poor encounters with customer service HBCU departments such as financial aid and admissions. Corey stated in his interview, "My PWI customer was much nicer." When discussing her HBCU entities, Tasha

suggested during the focus group, “I just don’t go so I won’t waste my time.” Tina mentioned during the focus group, “It really doesn’t matter the time of year and if it is when classes start, they still always have an attitude at my HBCU.” During the focus group Makayla added, “In my grad courses, I was automatically enrolled so I didn’t have many dealings the institutional departments.” Makayla also commented, during her interview “My HBCU instructional departments were so difficult to deal with and unpleasant.” In his video of advice, Stephen stated, “If I were you, I’d always choose better, go with the PWIs.”

Research Question Responses

The research questions that guided this study are answered in this section. Two sub-questions assisted in answering the central research question: What are the experiences of Black HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school? The first sub-question sought to understand the inhibiting factors that cause HBCU graduates to not return to their alma mater for graduate school. The second sub-question inquired about the motivating factors that caused HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school. The responses to these questions highlight the perceptions and lived experiences of Black HBCU graduate students attending PWIs for graduate school.

Central Research Question

The central research question was: What are the experiences of Black HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school? The participants offered profound insight regarding their individual experiences at their HBCUs and PWIs. The participants expressed the differences between their social relationships and interactions at both institutions amongst faculty and peers. Eight of the ten participants agreed that their encounters with faculty and their peers were better connected during their HBCU experiences than at their PWIs. “My

HBCU professors really gave me the tools to teach myself and the confidence I needed to know that I was capable, said Stephen in his interview. During the focus group Rose stated, “At my PWI, there was no real connection for me”. They both mentioned that they had great relationships during the HBCU experience and at their PWI. In the focus group Ashley mentioned, “Even my HBCU peers were supportive, and we looked out for each other”. Seven of the ten participants suggested that they keep in contact with their HBCU peers and faculty members after graduating. Walter said in his interview, “Socially, I had a nicer experience in my undergrad and was surrounded by people with very similar experiences to me”. He went on to say it was easier to relate and understand his peers during his undergraduate experience. Similarly, Makayla mentioned in the focus group, although she gets along with her PWI peers, she mainly associates with people of color. Four of the ten participants mentioned, they had a different perspective and need for faculty and peer relationships at their PWI for graduate school than what they needed during their undergraduate experiences. Makayla said in the focus group, “I was in two different stages of life, so I was looking for two different things with both experiences.” Rose said in the focus group, “During my undergraduate experience, I needed less flexibility and more community.”

Participants felt they had more of a sense of connection and belonging at their HBCUs in comparison to their PWIs. Walter stated in his interview, “I felt like I was in my neighborhood around my culture, so my HBCU felt like home.” Tasha suggested in her interview, “my HBCU laid the foundation for me, and I was really able to discover myself.” Seven of the ten participants mentioned choosing their HBCUs due to the culture, convenience, and affordability. Resources provided by the institutions was also a major topic of discussion. Moreover, four of the ten participants suggested having more opportunities for scholarships at their HBCUs than at

their PWIs. Rose mentioned in the focus group, this was probably due to more opportunities being offered for bachelor's degrees than master level degrees. When discussing scholarships, Corey suggested in the interview, "Resources at my HBCU were limited and you had to work harder to find them". Research and outreach opportunities was also stated to be poor at HBCUs by six of the ten participants. In contrast, Tina reported, "I think my HBCU offered me a silo of research opportunities; my PWI was very limited because Blacks don't do much research at my PWI."

Participants discussed having little to no racial issues during both their HBCU and PWI experiences with seven being "pleasantly surprised". Three of the ten participants expressed either seeing or experiencing racial encounters. Four of the ten participants gave their perceptions that they did not have any encounters with racism or bias possibly being due to being in online programs.

Customer service was also found to be less inviting and approachable at HBCUs than at PWIs. Eight of the ten participants mentioned that their institutional departments customer service such as financial aid departments and admissions were "not all that great". They suggested that these departments had a great need of improvement. One of the ten suggested having no interactions with customer service departments as they had a research advisor and class representative who made all requests on behalf of the students. Three of the ten participants mentioned choosing not to go to these departments unless they really needed to go. Despite negative encounters with campus departments, nine of ten participants suggested feeling prepared by their HBCUs to get a job within their profession. The one participant who did not feel well-prepared stated, "I felt underprepared, and I had to do a lot of self-learning to be able to compete in the job market".

Sub-Question One

The first sub-question was: What factors inhibited HBCU graduates from returning to their alma mater for graduate school? Seven of the ten participants mentioned not returning to their HBCU alma mater due to them not having their degree of interest. One even suggested, “my HBCU only offered undergraduate degrees”. Four of the ten participants mentioned they were able to get a scholarship and/or the PWI program was less expensive than the HBCU graduate program. When discussing resources, eight of the ten participants mentioned having greater resources and access to them at their PWI in comparison to their HBCU. The participants also suggested the few resources they did have at their HBCU were not easily accessible, such as amount of financial aid, computer and printer access, copy paper, and books at the library. Walter stated in the focus group, “There was significantly more resources available at my undergraduate program.” Ashley reported in the focus group, “I had more access to books available in the library, access to notable journal articles, computers, tablets, and iPads”.

Several of the participants were seeking different opportunities for research and outreach. Five of the ten participants mentioned having limited research opportunities at their HBCUs. One participant stated, “I couldn’t even get work study at my HBCU. Although there was opportunity for it, they just didn’t have the funds”. During the interview, Denice stated lack of career fairs and guest professionals coming in for networking opportunities during their HBCU experience.

The need for flexibility also inhibited several of the participants from returning to their alma mater for graduate school. Academic offerings with limited flexibility including course & track options, schedule flexibility, and having poor customer service. HBCUs also had limited programmatic options such as degrees, delivery methods, and locations. Limited opportunities with institutional resources and accommodations.

Sub-Question Two

The second sub-question was: What factors motivated HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school? Although none of the ten participants had any regrets in choosing their HBCU alma mater they were able to point out motivating factors that helped make their decision in choosing a PVI over an HBCU for graduate school. All the participants agreed on having more opportunities at the PWIs such as flexibility, resources, quality teaching, program/degree options. Walter stated during his interview, “The different networking opportunities, quality education, expansion of career opportunities, and learning under world-class professionals motivated me to choose my PVI”. He went on to say, “Having to do a lot of self-learning is what pushed me to choose a PVI for my graduate experience”. Lakeyn stated during the focus group that she was motivated by the thought of being able to successfully compete in the job market against others who are not of color.

Seven of the ten participants were able to participate in flexible programs that had asynchronous, hybrid, and/or online options while attending their PWIs. One student suggested, “I worked throughout my undergraduate experience, but had no flexibility”. He went on to express how having the option of flexibility at his graduate school was important and played a big part in his decision. A different student suggested the PVI having a well-manicured campus increased their motivation to attend.

The thought of having better customer service elsewhere excited and motivated some of the students to transition to a PVI. Nine of the ten participants reported having no issues with receiving financial aid on time or getting in contact with any institutional departments such as financial aid. Although one participant suggested, he feels like a number and another statistic at his PVI. He stated, “my PVI financial aid department is always rude to me, and I pretty much

feel overlooked”. Stephen suggested, “I’m a bit of a cost person, so making sure finances were great for me really helped push my decision”.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the research results depicting the inhibiting and motivating factors that influenced Black, HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school. The results were presented as they addressed the central research question of what were the experiences of Black, HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school. An analysis of data collected through focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and an advice video indicated several common themes that influenced the students to transition to a PWI for their graduate level experience. Based on the perceptions of the students, many of them chose to transition due to the institutional offerings of the PWI, such as other degree opportunities and the location of the institution. Programmatic academic offerings was also found to be a significant finding based on the PWIs flexible schedules and course delivery methods to aid those who needed to work and/or had other responsibilities. Lastly, the social relationships and interactions warranted a commonality that although the students had a cultural sense of belonging at their HBCU, they were able to connect with faculty and peers at their chosen PWI.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of recent Black, HBCU graduates ($N = 10$) who chose to transition to a PWI for graduate school. Prior research indicated Black, HBCU graduates transition to PWIs due to the institution's resources, financial aid amount, the experience, a culture familiar to childhood, and/or their lack of desire to remain in the location of the HBCU. There is a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of Black, HBCU graduates now attending or recently graduating from a PWI and what factors inhibited or motivated their transition. This research attempted to fill this gap by exploring the students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for leaving HBCUs and attending PWIs. This chapter highlights an interpretation of the findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study's findings through my interpretations. Through the lived experiences of my participants, I was able to gain an understanding of what factors played a role in them choosing to transition to a PWI for graduate school. A summary of the thematic findings with my interpretation of the findings, implications for policy and practice, empirical and theoretical implications, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black, HBCU graduates who transitioned to PWIs for graduate school. This study aimed to find what motivating and inhibiting factors influenced these students to transition to a

PWI for graduate school. Data were gathered using focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and advice videos to HBCU students interested in graduate school. The data were analyzed using coding and three major themes emerged: (a) institutional offerings, (b) programmatic academic offerings, and (c) social relationships and interactions. Subthemes were then developed from each major theme. The major theme of institutional offerings had three subthemes: (a) varying degree opportunities, (b) location, and (c) research and outreach opportunities. The major theme, programmatic academic offerings also had three subthemes: (a) program schedule flexibility, (b) course delivery method options, and (c) programmatic resource access. The last major theme, social relationships and interactions, had four subthemes: (a) peer and faculty connections, (b) cultural sense of belonging, (c) racial issues and biases, and (d) customer service. Significant interpretations rooted from the data collection methods were developed and summarized.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Participants shared freely their perceptions about their HBCU and PWI experiences and how those experiences motivated and/or inhibited their decision to choose a PWI for graduate school. The themes related to the central and sub research questions. The central research question was: What are the experiences of Black HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school? These experiences included social interactions, institutional resources, and accommodations. The first sub-research question was: What factors inhibited HBCU graduates from returning to their alma mater for graduate school? Inhibiting factors were found to be limited course flexibility, limited program options, and overall limited opportunities at HBCUs. The second sub-research question was: What factors motivated HBCU graduates from returning to their alma mater for graduate school? The motivating factors to transition to PWIs included the wide-range opportunities, flexibility of courses, and the resources of the programs.

Enhanced Opportunities. Enrollment in HBCUs provides students access to broad curricula, undergraduate degrees, and advanced degrees for the public (Bracey, 2017). In contrast, the reports of the participants included a lack of degree options, track programs, and online opportunities. According to Britton et al. (2022), HBCUs have minimal access to financial benefits and resources provided by the state governments in comparison to PWIs. In addition, being historically marginalized, HBCUs have never had enough resources and financial support for their students in comparison to PWIs (Britton et al., 2022). Because Black students tend to rely more heavily on loans and scholarships, they tend to transition to where they have less financial stress such as the participants of this study.

Black students also choose graduate colleges for academic, economic, and social reasons such as reputation of the institution, social life, tuition rates, financial aid, and academic department (Braddock & Hua, 2006; Van Camp et al., 2010). This is in comparison to the findings of this study and the experiences of the Black, HBCU graduates. From the findings, PWIs were able to offer these students a wider option of degree choices for their graduate degrees unlike HBCUs. The participants suggested that the opportunities at the PWI greatly impacted their decision-making when choosing which institution to attend for graduate school. Rose stated, “PWIs may offer a wider range of what you want to do.” PWIs also offered the opportunities to have multiple locations to choose from, as well as different platforms for learning such as hybrid and online programs.

Black, HBCU students also discussed having more research and outreach opportunities at their PWIs. Tina stated, “I really enjoyed my HBCU, and my professors were very helpful with research, but my PWI just had more opportunities due to all of the resources they were able to provide to students.” In addition, participants reported experiencing better customer service at

their PWIs in comparison to their HBCUs. Being able to be in a different environment was another opportunity sought after by some of the participants. Research shows HBCUs having several community barriers in contrast to PWIs (Smith et al., 2017). Johnson and Winfield (2022) determined that affordability, academic practices, diverse applicant pools, identity cultivation, and institutional values were critical components of having a supportive HBCU environment to aid students throughout their academic journeys towards success. This contrasts some of the participants stating their PWIs were cheaper than their HBCUs.

Needs Based Decisions. Research shows that HBCU environments are known for nurturing Black, underserved students and offering them a safe place to freely be themselves without judgement (Jackson, 2019). HBCU campus culture further provides students with the opportunity to assess themselves in the context with special attention being given to the relationship between personal, cultural, societal, and professional values (Williams, 2018). This literature compares to the findings of this study. Participants discussed how their environments provided nurturing atmospheres with supportive faculty and peers; however, due to different needs they still chose to transition to a PWI. Makayla stated, “choosing the institution depends on your current needs and what stage you are in, in life.” Denice mentioned she was looking for a more favorable location for her current needs of saving money and preparing for marriage during her PWI experience.

In the findings, participants discussed being in different stages of life with different needs when deciding upon their undergraduate and graduate level programs. For instance, Rose mentioned how she needed the close environment and heavy emphasis on Black culture during her undergraduate degree. This helped ease her into her college experience and transition from home. When she went to obtain her graduate degree, she was at a higher level of maturity and

did not need coddling from her professors, so she chose an online program. The needs changed based on their family life, work life, community needs, personal desires, amongst other components. Ashley said, “By the time I went to graduate school, I needed less hands-on and more flexibility so that I could work and be around my family more.”

Implications for Policy or Practice

Black, HBCU students can benefit from multiple supports, different strategies, and specific policies put into place to motivate students to remain within the institution for graduate school. The findings from the current research study reveal several implications for policy and practice. This section details different policy areas HBCUs can put into place for the betterment of the institution for Black students. These implications are discussed below with opportunities to foster resourceful environments for HBCU students.

Implications for Policy

Higher education policies and procedures at HBCUs must change to help support the needs of students during their undergraduate experiences to promote a desire to return for graduate degrees. The lack of track programs from undergraduate to graduate programs, which were absent for all participants in this study, indicates a need for change. State and federal policies should also increase the financial aid being offered to HBCUs. Similarly, to this study, Humphrey (2018) found that a Black student reported choosing a PWI for graduate school because of the school’s resources and the amount of financial aid offered in comparison to what was offered at the HBCU. PWIs receiving more financial award amounts in comparison to HBCUs is unequitable and influences students to transition. Federal and state agencies should also offer HBCUs an equal number of resources as they do for public PWIs. According to the participants of this study, their PWIs had greater amounts of resources available to them.

Institutional supports for customer service training should also be put into place at HBCUs to promote a warmer customer service environment from institutional departments. Many students in this study complained of financial aid employees not being approachable and/or readily available at their HBCUs. Policies and procedures should also be addressed to ensure faculty members are seeking and implementing professional development opportunities to give students an optimal educational experience. Lastly, HBCUs need to further develop online and hybrid programs for graduate school to offer different degrees and scheduling opportunities as graduates tend to leave for more flexibility based on this study's findings.

Implications for Practice

HBCUs need practical information that can be useful towards better accommodating students who enroll in their undergraduate and graduate programs. Universities and colleges are responsible for cultivating a sense of belonging for their diverse population in which all the participants reported having a sense of belonging at their HBCUs. Booker (2016) mentioned students should feel accepted and valued to develop a sense of belonging on campus in higher education. Institutions should also be concerned for their student's well-being; therefore, the need to understand how Black students perceive their experiences while in college should be a priority. Highlighting the voices of Black students by allowing them the opportunity to share their experiences can enlighten the administrators, faculty, and staff about how to best serve these students towards success which could ultimately increase their desire to return for graduate school after receiving undergraduate degrees. Implementing this for practice can possibly decrease the number of graduates who transition to PWIs for graduate school.

The knowledge generated from this study may be significant to HBCU institutions across the U.S., HBCU graduate and undergraduate programs, as well as PWI graduate programs. The

findings give HBCUs insight as to why students choose to transition to other institutions after graduating from their undergraduate program. The findings can also help HBCUs reassess their institution and focus any issues and/or gaps found. The data aids in developing a baseline for HBCUs to address concerns and the opportunity for more research to build upon it. In addition, it allows HBCUs to implement new practices to possibly retain more undergraduate college graduates.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This section addresses the theoretical and empirical implications of my study. Theoretically, this study utilized Ryan and Deci's (2020) Self Determination Theory to investigate the motivations behind students transitioning to PWIs for graduate school. The perceptions of HBCU students were explored for what intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivate them to transition to PWIs for graduate degrees (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This study confirmed that Black, HBCU students' personal experiences at their HBCUs influenced their transitions to PWIs for graduate school. The empirical implication of this study adds to the literature of phenomenological research by giving a voice to former Black, HBCU students who transitioned to PWIs for graduate school. Due to a gap in the literature, it is important to acknowledge and research the impact of the hardships at HBCUs and what motivates and inhibits students from returning for graduate school.

Theoretical Implication

The theoretical significance of this study reveals how the needs of Black, HBCU students align with the self-determination theory of motivation and how motivation influences the desire to transition to a PWI for graduate school (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theoretical significance of the study using the self-determination theory of motivation contributes to the foundation of the

problem of why Black students choose to leave their alma maters to attend PWIs for graduate school, rather than remain within the institution. This study confirmed through lived experiences that students chose to transition due to motivations and/or inhibitions. The lived experiences revealed challenges and negative and positive feelings about their connections with their HBCUs and PWIs. One of the biggest takeaways based on the findings, was that although they felt connected to their HBCUs, they were still internally and externally motivated to leave and attend a PWI for graduate school to further enhance what they received and their growth. All participants desired better opportunities and resources, more schedule flexibility, and other programmatic degree options in some capacity.

The psychological needs competence, autonomy, and relatedness of SDT aided in determining what has intrinsically and/or extrinsically influenced students to leave their HBCU alma maters for PWI graduate level programs (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivations were shown through the personal desire of wanting more opportunities, a different location, and flexibility from their institutions. Extrinsic influences were shown by experiencing biases, poor connections, poor environments, and poor resources at their HBCUs. Similarly, Gutierrez-Serrano et al. (2022), explored Latina first-generation students' perspectives of their college experiences using the self-determination theory. The authors found that using the self-determination theory determined that students need satisfying environments to support their small set of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Gutierrez-Serrano et al., 2022). Students choosing to leave their HBCU alma mater institutions based on their perceived motivations aided in bringing awareness to the theoretical significance of the problem by offering insight on how HBCUs can retain undergraduate students for continued education.

Empirical Implication

The empirical implication of this study adds to the literature of phenomenological research by giving a voice to former Black, HBCU graduates with a specific focus on those who transitioned to PWIs for graduate school. The transcendental phenomenological research approach used in this study gathered the lived experiences of Black, HBCU graduates who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school using focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and advice videos. The data collection methods I chose to use were deemed effective as they provided some valuable insight to the experiences of the participants, answered the research questions, and allowed themes to emerge based on lived experiences. From the findings, I found pertinent information that could benefit the sustainability of HBCUs and HBCU graduate programs. The outcome revealed that opportunities outweigh culture, familiarity, and comfort. Students are seeking the best experiences they could possibly have and are willing to leave less to gain more even if that means leaving behind what they enjoy. The participants all honed in on wanting more including resources, research, scholarships, financial aid, flexibility, and degree options. If HBCUs focus on these areas, they will become better competitors against their counterparts and possibly not lose as many of their Black, HBCU students.

Research has been conducted on HBCUs versus PWIs, HBCU hardships, first-time college students, and HBCU and PWI success (Johnson, 2019; Van Camp et al., 2010). In addition, researchers have examined why students both Black and White have chosen to either attend an HBCU and/or PWI over the other (Goings, 2016; Mwangi et al., 2018). Furthermore, studies have highlighted why PWIs may be seen as better than HBCUs and why HBCUs may be better for Black students (Anderson, 2017; Johnson, 2019). My study achieved similar results of

reflection since all participants graduated from an HBCU and transitioned to a PWI for graduate school. This study adds much needed value to literature and fills in some of the gaps for HBCUs.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited with the chosen age range of 22 to 40. Participants also had to have graduated from the PWI within a year and attended their institutions within the southeastern region. The study was also delimited by those who went to an HBCU first and then transitioned rather than simply understanding the experiences at both institutions. It was also delimited to only collecting data from Black students and no other ethnicities. Conducting a qualitative method was chosen over quantitative, because it is important to understand why students are making certain decisions rather than actual numbers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, a phenomenological study was chosen over an ethnographic study as it allowed me the opportunity to understand or describe lived experiences and to focus on their shared experience of the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Limitations of this study include specifications of the sample population. Participant age range and year of PWI attendance and graduation were requirements due to the focus of the study and increased possibility of recalling the experiences. As people mature, memory may alter and/or they may not have accurate recall of past events; therefore, the age range was between 22 and 40 years old. I also requested the students to have first attended an HBCU for their undergraduate experience and either currently attending or recently graduated from a PWI within a year. These factors limited my pool of eligible participants. Had it been opened to those who attended a PWI within two to five years, I would have had a larger sample to recruit participants. Reliance upon Black, HBCU graduates who transitioned to a PWI was necessary for this study; however, could present a weakness, as the memory may not be fully accurate depending on how

many years ago, they graduated from the HBCU. Time was also a limiting factor. Student school and work schedules presented an issue when attempting to select a day and time for the focus group; therefore, two focus groups were implemented to meet the needs of the participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

After completion of this study, it is apparent more research needs to be conducted for the specific population of Black, HBCU students and Black, PWI students. There are several recommendations for future research based on the findings of this research study.

While much research has been conducted on HBCUs and PWIs comparisons, research of the motivations and inhibitions behind transitioning to PWIs needs further examination to offer HBCUs valuable information as to why Black students leave their alma maters to attend PWIs offering the same graduate degrees. The findings function as a needs assessment for finding HBCU gaps and offer insight towards how to better serve Black students at both undergraduate and graduate levels. The first recommendation is that future studies can focus on Black, HBCU students who transitioned to PWIs for graduate school as a quantitative study to identify numbers involving the experiences of this study. Another study could focus on undergraduate program assessments and incorporating new tactics to enhance their programs based on the findings from this study. The study could also be delimited to Black students who transitioned from PWIs to attend HBCUs. Black students who are graduates of an HBCU and graduated within five years from a PWI could also be examined to broaden the range. The results could be compared to those of this study to determine any common themes. A different opportunity could be why White students choose not to attend HBCUs and their perceptions. More research could also be done based on the perceptions of the Black and White faculty members of the HBCUs and the gaps they see to maximize the potential of HBCUs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of Black, HBCU graduates who transitioned to PWIs for graduate school. Ryan and Deci's (2020) self-determination theory of motivation was the theory guiding this study. This study was conducted to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of Black HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school? Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, I collected the lived experiences during their HBCU matriculation and their PWI journey to discover emerging themes. The study included sample of 10 Black, HBCU graduates (males ($N=3$; females ($N=7$)). who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school were between the ages of 22 to 34 years old. To facilitate triangulation, data collection included focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and advice videos. Data analysis followed the steps for transcendental phenomenology and phenomenological reduction as explained by Moustakas (1994).

Horizontalization was used to find horizons and then coded into themes. Textural and structural descriptions were condensed into summary formats to describe the essence of the phenomenon. The major themes found included institutional offerings, programmatic academic offerings, and social relationships and interactions. Future research of Black, HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI may further highlight some holes at HBCUs and how they can implement changes for the betterment of Black, undergraduate students.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 20, 2023

Jessica Maxwell
Sherrita Rogers

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-706 Historically Black Colleges and University Graduates transitioning to Predominantly White Institutions for Graduate School: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Jessica Maxwell, Sherrita Rogers,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: January 20, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s): Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Recruitment: Social Media

ATTENTION BLACK HBCU GRADUATE: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Higher Education Administration: Educational Leadership at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to examine the perceptions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) graduates who transitioned to Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) for graduate school. Participants will share what motivating factors influenced them to transition to a PWI rather than remaining with their HBCU alma mater for graduate school. To participate, you must be Black and 22 to 40 years of age, have an undergraduate degree from an HBCU, and currently attending or recently graduated within one year from a PWI as a graduate student. Participants will be asked to participate in a Zoom focus group (1 hour), Zoom interview (30 to 45 minutes), and record a 2-minute video. Participants will also be asked to member check transcripts such as checking for accuracy and confirming agreement of the transcriptions (5 to 15 minutes).

If you are interested in participating, please click the screening survey link, [Screening Form](#), and complete the survey within one week using Google Forms. The survey will automatically return to the researcher and your email address will be collected.

After the I receive your completed survey and confirm you meet the inclusionary criteria to participate, you will receive further instructions that will include a consent form attachment and a calendar link to <https://www.when2meet.com/>. The time slots provided will be used to set up the focus group meeting with other participants.

If you do not meet the criteria, you will receive an email indicating so and thanking you for your interest. Please anticipate manually and/or electronically signing the consent form and completing the calendar link with your availability within two weeks.

By completing the consent form, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign the consent form. You will be able to download a copy of the consent form for your records. I will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after completing the survey and/or signing the consent form, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED] and/or [REDACTED] or my faculty sponsor, [REDACTED], at [REDACTED]

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.

Appendix C

Consent Form: General

Title of the Project: Historically Black Colleges and University Graduates Transitioning to Predominantly White Institutions for Graduate School: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Jessica Maxwell, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be Black, between the ages of 22 to 40 years old, have an undergraduate degree from a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), and are currently attending as a graduate student or have recently graduated with a graduate degree within a year from a Primarily White Institution (PWI). Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to examine and understand the perceptions of HBCU graduates who transitioned to PWIs for graduate school. The aim is to understand what motivating factors influenced these students to leave their HBCU alma mater and transition to a PWI for graduate school.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an online focus group using Zoom that will take no more than 1 hour. The focus group with other participants involved will be recorded (audio/video).
2. Participate in individual interviews using Zoom that will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The interview will be recorded (audio/video).
3. Participate in recording a short, no longer than 2-minute video, giving advice to an undergraduate, HBCU student interested in graduate school.
4. Participants will be asked to member check transcripts checking for accuracy of the transcriptions.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include bringing awareness to HBCU stakeholders of the gaps in the HBCU institutions and insight on how they can be improved based on the perceptions of the participants. The findings can aid future HBCU undergraduate students when selecting graduate programs and the study can also serve as a baseline for future research and fill the gaps in current literature.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before any data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer in a locked password-protected folder in the researcher's locked office. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer and password-protected folder for three years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and the research committee will be the only ones with access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting any relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jessica Maxwell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] and/or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sherrita Rogers, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is

Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be able to download a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Liberty University
IRB-FY22-23-706
Approved on 1-20-2023

Appendix D

Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Questions

1. Please share with everyone where you are from and the degree you're currently seeking
(Ask students not to share HBCU/PWI institution name for confidentiality). (CRQ)
2. Why did you choose to attend an HBCU for your undergraduate degree? (CRQ)
3. Based on your experiences, what do you feel are important factors when choosing a
HBCU/PWI? (CRQ, SQ2)
4. Describe what your PWI program offers that may be more/less valuable than what you
received at the HBCU? (SQ1, SQ2)
5. If you had the opportunity to do it all over again, explain if would you make the same
decision and why (go to the HBCU for undergrad and PWI for grad)? (CRQ, SQ1, &
SQ2)

Appendix E
Interview Protocol

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please tell me your name, undergraduate institution, and graduate institution and your reasons for going to graduate school.
2. Explain the reasons you chose to attend an HBCU for your undergraduate experience.
(CRQ)
3. Explain the factors that caused you not to stay at your HBCU alma mater for graduate school. (SQ1)
4. Explain what may have motivated you to transition to a PWI. (SQ2)
5. Describe what things worked better for you at the HBCU in comparison to the PWI.
(CRQ)
6. Explain your relationship with faculty at the HBCU in comparison to the PWI (Positive and/or negative). (CRQ)
7. Explain if you have experienced any racial issues during your undergraduate or graduate experience. (CRQ, SQ1)
8. Explain how prepared and equipped you felt to get hired and be successful after graduating from your HBCU alma mater. (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
9. Explain your sense of belonging at your HBCU alma mater in comparison to your PWI.
(CRQ)
10. Explain your experiences with the resources offered at your HBCU in comparison to your PWI. (CRQ)

11. Explain the differences between your relationship with your classmates/peers at both HBCU and PWI. (CRQ)
12. Explain the differences between the institutional departments' customer service at both your HBCU and PWI (i.e., financial aid department, admissions, etc.). (CRQ)
13. Explain how your PWI met or is meeting your expectations as a graduate student. (SQ2)
14. What regrets, if any, do you have for not returning to your HBCU alma mater for your graduate degree. (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
15. Describe any additional facts you would like to share that you have not yet shared based on your experiences at either HBCU and/or PWI. (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

Appendix F

Video Advice Prompt

“As a Black, HBCU graduate and PWI graduate student, what would you tell a Black, undergraduate student currently attending a HBCU and interested in graduate school?”

Appendix G

Transcript Bracketing Sample

18:03:47 (Researcher): Can you explain the reasons why you chose to attend an HBCU for your undergraduate experience?

18:04:03 (Participant 1): Oh! I would say the number one reason was just because of the the community feeling that I had when I went on campus, when I went to the campus, you know, I I felt like I was home, you know, I felt like I was around the culture who you know understood me. [Not all Black people are used to being around other Black people. I personally felt a cultural shock going from a PWI to an HBCU.]

~~18:04:22 (Participant 1): So that was the first reason why I, you know, feel like, hey, this could be the place for me.~~

18:04:27 (Participant 1): Other than that. I did some research. I kind of knew that I wanted to go to a HBCU just because of the history. [I didn't know much about HBCU history until going there for my master's degree.]

18:04:34 (Participant 1): And you know the band, all of it. It just sounded like it was something that I would be interested in. [For me the band is the smallest thing on the list that matters when choosing a college.]

~~18:04:39 (Participant 1): So that was a saking to us, and they actually came to speak in my school to there was a counselor there, so they came to speak in my school as well.~~

18:05:03 (Researcher): Explain the factors that caused you not to stay at your HBCU.

18:05:10 (Participant 1): So there were several different factors. For one. ~~Excuse me right at~~ when I got my bachelors I was hired right out of school at my intern, so I did not go. [My HBCU also prepared me to work when I graduated.]

~~18:05:24 (Participant 1): My plan was not to give my masters. At first I was like what they offer me a job.~~

~~18:05:28 (Participant 1): I'm gonna go. So that was in my plan.~~

18:05:37 (Participant 1): But yeah, so that wasn't my plan. And I actually end up changing my major during that time that I was actually not in school.

18:05:44 (Participant 1): So which is good for me, because I feel like that was where I needed to be.

18:05:47 (Participant 1): ~~Now.~~ But yeah, it was my original plan to get my master.

18:05:53 (Participant 1): So, even if I were to, even if I would have considered them, 5 years later.

18:05:58 (Participant 1): It was about 5 years. 6 years later. They didn't offer what I was interested in at the time, anyway, so it would not have been an option for state or I didn't look at. [HBCUs are limited a lot by what they offer].

~~18:06:02 Wow!~~

18:06:15 (Participant 1): I only looked at them, and I looked at the other HBCU for an option that was not available for my major, for my masters.

~~18:06:21 You kinda you're it kind of froze.~~

~~18:06:25 So you said, you only consider. Go back out, go throw it away.~~

~~18:06:31 You say you only consider. What did you say last~~

18:06:34 (Participant 1): I only consider for my masters, as far as HBCU.

18:06:38 (Participant 1): ~~Use.~~ I looked at a new school, but I was also looking for a online program as well.

18:06:46 (Participant 1): So they didn't offer that for me. With that Major

18:06:48 (Researcher): ~~Get it? Getcha? Okay? Okay. Okay.~~ Next question. Explain what may have motivated you to transition to a PWI.

~~18:07:00 So why a pwi? And why not another Hbcu~~

18:07:08 (Participant 1): For me the flexibility of a pwi, and just just the tracks that they offered. [This was a good reason to go. I also needed flexibility as I got older.]

18:07:16 (Participant 1): So, of course, like I said, with elevators, say, I only looked at 2 Hbc use, and they didn't offer what I wanted, and also with the Pw.

18:07:25 (Participant 1): It was more flexibility for me, because at that time, you know, I was working full time, and I needed to continue to do that.

18:07:31 (Participant 1): So they had online classes and programs that I was able to kind of be flexible with.

18:07:36 (Participant 1): When I wanted to, and I was able to change if I needed to.

~~18:07:40 (Participant 1): In all of that. So the flexibility of the Pw.~~

~~18:07:42 I work the best for me~~

18:07:43 (Researcher): Okay, next question, describe what things work better for you at the Hbcu in comparison to the pwi.

~~18:07:58 So what work better if they receive~~

18:08:04 (Participant 1): Well, I think that I was in different stages of my life between the Hbcu and the Pws.

18:08:09 (Participant 1): So at the at the Hbcu. Of course the community for me work better I was on campus.[I disagree with the community being something of interest. I experienced a cultural shock when I went from a PWI to a HBCU.]

~~18:08:14 (Participant 1): That was around people, you know, I was actually in physical places.~~

18:08:20 (Participant 1): The whole community aspect of the Hbcu, and as well as the teachers as well so I looked at some of them.

18:08:26 (Participant 1): It's not just a teacher, but a mentor. I was able to connect with them on a personal level. [I had a good experience with most of my professors; although I do believe some gave me a hard time on purpose.]

18:08:30 (Participant 1): If I had to go sit in their office or see them, or anything like that.

18:08:34 (Participant 1): I was just there on campus, so I feel like at that time it was just different experiences from the Hbcu and the PWI.

18:08:43 (Participant 1): Because I was in 2 different stages of life as well.

18:08:45 (Participant 1): So I needed. I feel like I needed that can especially right out of high school.

18:08:50 (Participant 1): I went to, you know, to college. So I needed that community.

18:08:53 (Participant 1): I feel like it benefited me more to be on campus. I honestly don't think that I would have. I probably would have been fine, but I don't think that I would have had the greatest experience with my bachelors if I just went straight to like a online or a pwi

18:09:07 (Researcher): Okay, explain your relationship with faculty. At an Hbcu in comparison to the pwi.

~~18:09:15 Whether that's positive or negative.~~

18:09:32 (Participant 1): Yeah. So, well, some of the faculty was nice. I feel like in one aspect some of the the faculty or the the stigma around HBCU. [I agree.]

18:09:34 (Participant 1): You know, and that is nice. But I did have some relationships with a few professors, and it and one of my advisors, you know that I still kind of move to to today.

~~18:09:44 Hmm.~~

18:09:45 (Participant 1): So I could say that I have. You know I had some some okay ones where you know I wouldn't go and accent for anything, and then I've had somewhere, you know, I feel comfortable going to talk to.

18:09:56 (Participant 1): So that's definitely different than the pwi. And I don't know if it was because I was online or not.

Appendix H

Data Analysis

Research Questions	Codes	Themes	Subthemes
<p>What factors inhibited HBCU graduates from returning to their alma mater for graduate school? (SQ1)</p> <p>What are the experiences of Black HBCU graduate students who transitioned to a PWI for graduate school? (CRQ)</p> <p>What factors motivated HBCU graduates to transition to PWIs for graduate school? (SQ2)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty Relationships • Reason for Graduate School • Undergraduate Advice • Regrets • PWI Expectations • Institutional Department • Customer Service • Peer Relationships • Resources • Sense of belongingness at HBCU • HBCU preparedness • Racial Issues • HBCU over PWI (What worked better) • Why A PWI? • Factors Not to Stay at HBCU 	<p>Institutional Offerings</p> <p>Programmatic Academic Offerings</p> <p>Social Relationships and Interactions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course & Track Options • Schedule Flexibility • Poor Customer Service • Degree Opportunities • Delivery Method • Location • Institutional Resources & Accommodations • Research, Outreach, & Networking Opportunities

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Significant Statements
<i>Institutional Offerings</i>	Varying Degree Opportunities Location Research and Outreach Opportunities	“My HBCU did not even offer graduate degrees, so I really had no choice but to leave.”
<i>Programmatic Academic Offerings</i>	Program Schedule Flexibility Course Delivery Method Options Programmatic Resource Access	“In undergrad, there were only one or two choices so that flexibility just wasn’t there to also be able to work full-time; but, my PWI had their program set up to be able to also work full-time with less stress.”
<i>Social Relationships and Interactions</i>	Peer and Faculty Connections Cultural Sense of Belonging Racial Issues and Biases Customer Service	“Ah for me, it was the culture for sure at my HBCU.” “I visited and it felt like home and I felt like I was in the neighborhood.”

Appendix I

Memoing

My role as a human instrument in this qualitative study, was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. My role in this study was correlated to the phenomenon of students choosing to transition to PWIs for graduate school. I am a Black female who worked within an HBCU graduate program that often seek HBCU undergraduate students to transition to my master's level program. My previous position in higher education may impact how I view the data as it will be easy to apply the findings to why students may not apply to our program. My desire for program prosperity, growth of HBCUs, and my love for all students, especially those who have more disadvantages (i.e., minorities) may have also impacted how I view the data. The findings helped to give insight as to how I could learn from the students to increase the success of our program. I currently serve as a professor for another minority serving institution and this data could assist with my current program as well.

I was within the field to build rapport and collect data byway of interviews. I did not have authority over participants and/or push them to participate. The potential bias or assumptions I brought as a human instrument was my own experience at HBCUs and pre-assumptions as to why students chose to leave or remain within the university. My role was not to interpret, but to gather the data of the experience of each student to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. As the human instrument, I observed, conducted interviews, and spoke to the participants. I also transcribed the data, composed into common themes, and inputted into a qualitative software to be analyzed.

While talking to the participants, I had to put my biases and assumptions aside based on my experience. I personally experienced poor customer service from admissions, customer

service, and professors while getting my master's degree at my HBCU. I also encountered White students acting superior to those of color including myself. My financial aid was not always distributed on time causing financial burdens when paying bills or buying books. As I recalled these things, I made sure not to agree with the students or mention my own stories to ensure I focused solely on their perspectives and experiences.

Appendix J

Significant Statements Sample

Oh! I would say the number one reason was just because of the community feeling that I had when I went on campus, when I was on HBCU campus, you know, I I felt like I was home, you know, I felt like I was around the culture who you know understood me.

Chose an HBCU for Undergrad

So there were several different factors. For one. Excuse me right at when I got my bachelors I was hired right out of school at my intern, so I did not go or desire a master's at the time. But yeah, so that wasn't my plan. But later when I did decide to go back for my master's degree, my HBCU didn't have the major I wanted.

Factors Not to Stay at HBCU

For me the flexibility of a pwi, and just just the tracks that they offered. It was more flexibility for me, because at that time, you know, I was working full time, and I needed to continue to do that.

So they had online classes and programs that I was able to kind of be flexible with. When I wanted to, and I was able to change if I needed to. In all of that. So the flexibility of the PWI. I work the best for me.

Why A PWI?

I don't think that I had any. Let me think. Yeah, I didn't have any issues, any racial issues, for sure. And even with my Pw. All the professors would not but I didn't. You know I talked to him when I needed, or if I had a question I had, you know I was. I know I didn't have any issues, any racial issues at all. It could be possibly because it's online. I think they definitely, you know, the chances are better if I had been taking classes in person possibly, but I was online with no picture up or real connection.

Racial Issues

Well, I think that I was in different stages of my life between the HBCU and the PWIs.

So at the at the HBCU, of course the community for me work better I was on campus.

That was around people, you know, I was actually in physical places. The whole community aspect of the HBCU, and as well as the teachers as well so I looked at some of them. It's not just a teacher, but a mentor. I was able to connect with them on a personal level. If I had to go sit in their office or see them, or anything like that. I was just there on campus, so I feel like at that time it was just different experiences from the Hbcu and the PWI. Because I was in 2 different stages of life as well. I feel like I needed that can especially right out of high school. I went to, you know, to college. So, I needed that community. I feel like it benefitted me more to be on campus. I honestly don't think that I would have. I probably would have been fine, but I don't think that I would have had the greatest experience with my bachelors if I just went straight to like a online or a PWI.

HBCU over PWI (What worked better)