

ABSTRACT

MORTON IV, FELIX. More Than Meets the Eye: Exploring Wellness in Black College Men (Under the direction of Dr. Marc Grimmett and Dr. Adria Dunbar).

This qualitative research study is a consensual qualitative research design exploring the lived-experiences of 12 Black college men who participated in a Black Male Initiative program at a predominantly White institution. The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how Black Male Initiative programs influence the wellness of Black college men at predominantly white institutions. Additionally, this study aimed to explore what wellness means to Black college men. The BMI programs that exist at PWIs appear to either address wellness from a general, undefined perspective or focus predominantly on academic issues. Black men attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have stated many aspects of their college experiences that have harmfully impacted their mental health and wellness while attending college. Research shows that BMI programs positively influence Black male student sense of community and belonging, academic achievement, and retention and persistence at PWIs, ameliorating students' stress levels and improving wellness outcomes. However, research documenting Black men's definition of wellness, as well as BMI's impact on Black men's wellness at PWIs, is lacking. Furthermore, this qualitative study addresses a gap in the counseling literature concerning the wellness of Black college men.

The research questions of the study were "How do Black college men at predominantly White institutions define wellness?", "How does the sociocultural context of a predominantly White institution influence Black college men's wellness?" and "In what ways does participation in Black Male Initiative programs influence Black men's wellness?" Through semi-structured interviews and consensual team-based data analysis, this study

analyzes the experiences of 12 Black men through concentrating them as the experts of their wellness needs in college and beyond. A team of coders, led by the primary researcher, with the assistance of one external auditor, analyzed the data and came to a consensus on the following themes as expressed by the participants. The results suggested three domains representing Black college men's wellness at PWIs: meaning of wellness, PWI experiences, and BMI's wellness influence. All members of the sample defined wellness as balance, using subthemes of breathing, becoming, and being to better explain Black men's relationship to and understanding of wellness as a concept and life-long goal. The participants believed their wellness at PWIs was influenced by pre-college experiences, difficulties in their college transition, feelings of isolation while navigating college, and finding a home-away-from-home in their institution's BMI. Lastly, it was discovered that participation in the Black Male Initiative program influenced participants' wellness during their time in college. Additionally, several participants believed that their BMI program also positively influenced their wellbeing post-graduation. Understanding these unique perspectives as it relates to counselor education programs can help counselor educators continue to advocate for culturally-responsive services across higher education and student affairs and amplify the voices of marginalized clients as the experts of their wellbeing.

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More Than Meets the Eye: Exploring Wellness in Black College Men

by
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents. Felix Morton III and Shirley Kelly-Morton are career-long educators, and are the reason that I chose to become an educator. Ever since I was boy, you all have sacrificed to provide access to endless opportunities for Bruce and me to advance our lives for the better. You all showed us that education can lead to endless possibilities, and instilled in us a sense of pride and tenacity as young Black men, in world that often looks down on them.

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BIOGRAPHY

Felix Morton IV is a licensed clinical mental health counselor (LCMHC), national certified counselor (NCC), and certified clinical trauma professional (CCTP) in Cary, North Carolina. He has experience in K12 education as a teacher and school counselor and has served clients across hospital, community, and college settings as a therapist and wellness educator. His professional and scholarly interests include but are not limited to Black men's health and wellness across the lifespan, sense of belonging, and inclusion and accessibility, and college student wellness. He has published research on college student mental health and was named the 2022 Mental Health Advocate of the Year by the Black Mental Health Symposium. He was also awarded fellowships by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) and the American Psychological Association (APA) due to his commitment to improving the quality of mental health care provided to ethnic and racial minorities.

Felix was born and raised in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Middle Grades Education from East Carolina University in 2013, where he was also a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. He earned a Master of Education in Higher Education Administration at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and a Master of Arts in Counseling from Wake Forest University. Felix has advocated for access to higher education and culturally-affirming clinical support for students across the K16 pipeline, with special attention to the experiences of Black boys and men. Through his efforts, Felix developed a professional network of Black male counselors to promote access to care for diverse populations of individuals. His network has been nationally recognized, and has grown to nearly 400 Black male counselors nationwide, with over 50% providing clinical

services. In his free time, Felix enjoys watching movies, reading comics, attending sporting events, and spending time with friends and family.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Now, more than ever, the illusions of division threaten our very existence. We all know the truth: *more connects us than separates us*. But in times of crisis, the wise build bridges, while the foolish build barriers. We must find a way to look after one another as if we were one single tribe.

—King T’Challa (Chadwick Boseman), *Black Panther*

College students’ mental health and wellness concerns are reaching crisis levels across American higher education (Siegel et al., 2022). In an 8-year Healthy Minds study of college student mental health, results from over 350,000 students across 373 college campuses revealed that over 60% of students met criteria for one or more mental health concerns between 2020 and 2021, an almost 50% increase since 2013 (Lipson et al., 2022). Many instances of mental health-related challenges, such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicidality, have harmfully impacted students’ undergraduate experiences (Oswalt et al., 2020; Siegel et al., 2022), with students of color being at heightened risk (Busby et al., 2021).

In the fall of 2020, racial/ethnic minorities represented 46% of undergraduate students at 4-year public institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). While studies addressing college student mental health and wellbeing have given insight into familiar challenges college students faced overall (American College Health Association, 2008; Blanco et al., 2008), specific challenges of Black men attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have yet to be explored in a meaningful way in the counseling literature. “Understanding the mental health needs of these students, and heterogeneity therein, is essential to supporting wellbeing and advancing equity” (Lipson et al., 2022, p. 139).

The Challenges

Black men experience some overlapping challenges while enrolled at PWIs, but also some unique challenges that other students may not experience. For example, after enrolling in college, some of the challenges that impact Black male student success at PWIs have included issues related to campus climate (Brooms, 2016; Strayhorn & Devita, 2010), social isolation (Harper, 2013), racial discrimination (Harper & Hurtado, 2007) and the lack of institutional support agents (Palmer et al., 2014). These challenges have contributed to low retention and graduation rates and health-related concerns such as substance abuse, anxiety, violence, stress, social and psychological disengagement, depression, and other threats to their health and wellbeing (Kendrick et al., 2007; Major et al., 1998; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Watkins et al., 2010).

Evidence of the Challenges

“College students of color remain an understudied population with regard to mental health” (Lipson et al., 2018, p. 349). The unique challenges faced by Black students navigating college often threaten their health and wellness, positioning them at risk for worse wellness outcomes (Helling & Chandler, 2021; Mushonga, 2021; Strayhorn et al., 2015). Research shows that college counseling centers are experiencing a high demand for clinical services by students, yet they are struggling to address the unique psychological challenges and wellness needs of Black college students (Banks, 2020; Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2018; Helling & Chandler, 2021).

While research on the wellness of Black college students is growing, scholarship examining the experiences of Black men at PWIs is limited. Research on health-related services on college campuses reports that Black women seek mental health services at higher

rates than Black men and that Black men are at an elevated risk of suicide, which is the second leading cause of death by college students (Busby et al., 2021). Black male college students have been harmfully impacted by mental stigma and have concerns about cultural differences, identity, and power dynamics with clinical providers, leading to an underutilization of college counseling services (Helling & Chandler, 2021; Hunt et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2004).

Responses to the Challenges

To address these impediments, scholars have indicated the need for identity-focused support personnel and programming catered to Black male college students, especially those at predominantly White colleges and universities (Brooms, 2018; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Strayhorn, 2008). Institutions across the U.S. have developed outreach and support programs to serve as resources for students to engage in throughout their collegiate journeys. Programs such as these have been established through institutional, state, and national initiatives, with the hopes of positively impacting Black male social engagement and academic integration experiences while in college (Brooms, 2018a, 2018b; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Strayhorn et al., 2015).

Research traditionally focuses on the experiences of undergraduate college students as a general population; however, over the years, research highlighting the experiences of specific populations of students, particularly students of color attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs), has become critical. Specifically, the challenges faced by those from historically underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds have gained more attention because of their unique experiences and challenges while enrolled at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). A PWI is defined in the literature as a college or university where white

students comprise 50% or more of the entire student population (Bourke, 2016; Harper, 2013).

In 2019, men represented 43.9% of all post-secondary enrollment, with Black men representing only 4.6% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). With only 34% of Black men who begin a bachelor's degree graduating from 4-year institutions over a 6-year period, marking the lowest rate of degree attainment of all students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), retention and attrition of Black men students continue to be a critical concern (Brooms, 2018a; Harper, 2007; Strayhorn et al., 2015). Black men attending predominantly white institutions face a number of challenges while in college that negatively impact both their persistence and their psychological health and wellness (Brooms, 2018b; Strayhorn et al., 2015). Additionally, "Black male college students reported significantly higher minority status stress than Asian American and Latino peers at predominantly White institutions" (Cokley et al., 2013). Threats to Black male student wellness included but are not limited to lack of social support, racial microaggressions, lack of sense of belonging, stereotype threat, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns (Goodwill et al., 2022; Strayhorn et al., 2015).

Given the barriers to institutional clinical support, many Black college men at PWIs have relied on identity-focused programming and interventions to support their wellbeing while in college. Many institutions have created programming to better support the needs of Black college men, with hopes of positively influencing their collegiate success, personal development, and health and wellbeing. In recent years, Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs have been utilized on college campuses to promote the retention, persistence, and success of Black college men throughout their college matriculation (Brooms, 2018a; St.

Léger, 2012). Given the research documenting the success of these initiatives relating to Black college men's sense of belonging, racial identity development, sense of social support, and academic persistence, and with an ever-increasing number of Black men enrolling at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), the need for BMI programs, along with additional targeted forms of support, is becoming more evident. This project aimed to highlight the unique experiences and support in place for Black college men at predominantly White institutions.

Problem Statement

The BMI programs that exist at PWIs are assumed to influence student wellness by positively impacting other aspects of their college experience with a general, undefined perspective or focusing predominantly on academic issues. Black men attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have stated many aspects of their college experiences that have harmfully impacted their mental health and wellness while attending college. Research shows that regardless of institutional type, BMI programs have become known for their ability to positively influence Black male student sense of community and belonging, academic achievement, and retention and persistence (Brooms, 2018a, 2018b), essentially ameliorating students' stress levels and improving wellness outcomes. However, research documenting Black men's definition of wellness, as well as BMI's impact on Black men's wellness at PWIs, is lacking. With a plethora of literature highlighting Black Male Initiative programs' usefulness in enhancing students' sense of belonging, social support, and academic achievement, there is an opportunity to better understand its direct impact on student wellness outcomes while at predominantly White institutions. A better understanding of the threats and supports to mental health that exist for Black men in college could provide

a step forward in our efforts to reduce health and educational disparities persistent in our society (Williams et al., 2022).

Research Design and Purpose of Study

Much research has been done to better understand how college outreach and support programs, specifically BMI programs, have supported the academic success and college persistence of Black male college students (Brooms, 2018a, 2018b; Strayhorn et al., 2015). While much of this research has discussed or referenced the impact of these programs on student wellbeing, there is a need for research that specifically focuses on wellbeing as a sole construct. The are two goals of this study. The primary purpose of this study is to better understand how Black Male Initiative programs influence the wellness of Black college men at predominantly white institutions. By this, this study hopes to better understand if and how predominantly white institutions (PWI) address the wellness needs of Black college men through campus-based institutional support. Additionally, this study aims to explore what wellness means to Black college men. The study aims to achieve this purpose by examining the lived experiences of Black college men within BMI programs and integrating their viewpoints to gain a consensual understanding of their experiences.

A qualitative approach was used for this study. A consensual qualitative research methodology was appropriate for this intended study because it aimed to expand the literature on Black college men by concentrating on Black men as the experts of their wellness and lived experiences. “CQR is an ideal method because researchers can interview people to find out in-depth information that cannot easily be found using traditional experimental and quantitative methods” (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 4). Additionally, “CQR is ideal for conducting in-depth studies of the inner experiences of individuals” (Hill et al.,

2005, p. 23). This method was appropriate for this research study because of my desire to investigate and understand the lived experiences and perspectives of Black college men involved in the Black Male Initiative program at a predominantly White institution. This approach will enable me to obtain rich information regarding their lived experiences and perceptions of the BMI program on their campus.

Additionally, the researcher hoped to examine how these men define and perceive mental health and wellness and gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of BMI's influence on their mental health and wellbeing in college. Finally, the CQR approach for this study also provided an opportunity to compare and contrast participant responses and offer implications for future research regarding work with this population of students on predominantly white college campuses.

Study Significance

Although much work has been done to combat the ongoing mental health crisis on college campuses nationwide, students of color, particularly Black men, desperately need focused care and consideration. Research frequently highlights the need for services addressing mental health support for Black men while attending college (Goodwill et al., 2022). Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs have become recognized as successful social cohesion programs to provide students with support and resources to increase college retention and graduation rates (Brooms, 2018a).

A better understanding of the relationship between BMI and Black male student wellness can provide student affairs professionals with an increased understanding of not only the direct impact but also opportunities for program evaluation and improvement in efforts toward holistic student development. Additionally, research examining how a specific

student support program impacts mental health and wellbeing can be useful in determining best practices in preventative programming and generalizability across institutions, professional fields, and academic disciplines. Lastly, counselors and counselor educators may find the study findings useful as they work to advocate for holistic development and wellbeing in educational contexts and promote culturally considerate interventions and programming.

Research Questions

This study is designed to answer four research questions to gain a fuller understanding of students' wellbeing through involvement in a Black Male Initiative program at a predominantly White institution of higher education. Those questions are:

1. How do Black men define wellness?
2. How does the sociocultural context of a PWI influence Black men's wellness?
3. In what ways does participation in Black Male Initiative programs influence Black men's wellness?

Definition of Terms

A better understanding of the relationship between BMI and Black male student wellness can provide student affairs professionals with an increased understanding of not only direct impact but also opportunities for program evaluation and improvement in efforts toward holistic student development. Additionally, research examining how a specific student support program impacts mental health and wellbeing can be useful in determining best practices in preventative programming and generalizability across institutions, professional fields, and academic disciplines. Lastly, counselors and counselor educators may find the study findings useful as they work to advocate for holistic development and

wellbeing in educational contexts and promote culturally considerate interventions and programming.

For this study, the following definitions are operationalized based on their common use:

Black: a person belonging to various population groups of African ancestry often considered to have dark skin pigmentation but a wide range of skin colors (Walters, 2017). Terms Black and African American may be used interchangeably throughout the study based on current and previous research.

Black college men: Black or African American college students who self-identify as men. For this study, **males** and **men** may be used interchangeably because of their usage in current and previous literature on Black college men and Black male college students.

Wellness/Wellbeing: “Wellness incorporates a holistic approach in which all aspects of health are interconnected contributing to a healthy lifestyle” (Oliver et al., 2019, p. 1638). For this study, wellness aligned with the definition developed by Myers et al. (2000), in that wellness is “the optimum state of health and well-being that each individual is capable of achieving” (p. 252). Therefore, this dissertation uses the terms wellness and wellbeing interchangeably.

Black Male Initiative: Black Male Initiative programs are social cohesion programs that aim to provide Black male students support and resources to increase their college retention and graduation rates (Brooms, 2018a, 2018b). BMIs have become respected on college campuses because of their ability to promote and enhance a sense of belonging, student retention rates, and academic success in Black male students throughout their matriculation (Brooms, 2018a, 2018b; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; St. Léger, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation aims to better understand how Black college men involved in a Black Male Initiative program at a predominantly White institution believe it has influenced their wellbeing in college. I highlight literature on a sense of belonging, engagement, and persistence because of its well-documented incorporation in BMI programs and its positive impact on student wellbeing (Brooms, 2018a, 2018b). However, because of my focus on wellness, I incorporated a conceptual, theoretical framework that helped me better understand wellness as it relates to college students.

With this in mind, I intend to utilize the collection of Hettler's (1980, 1984) six-dimensional model of wellness, the Wheel of Wellness (Myers et al., 2000), and the Indivisible Self (Myers & Sweeney, 2005b) model when exploring wellness in this study, and examine how engagement in a Black Male Initiative at a predominantly White institution impacts the wellness of Black college men. Each model offers valuable considerations when evaluating holistic wellness and can provide researchers with the foundational knowledge of human behavior and motivation.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of the proposed study are boundaries set on the study because of the research specifications. Delimitations are boundaries set in the study by the researcher. One of the key delimitations of this study is that the sample population for this work would not address wellness efforts within a student support program offered to all college students and would focus specifically on those offered to Black male students. This was intentional because of my position as a Black man who has attended and graduated from PWIs, and my specific desire to contribute to the existing literature on wellness among Black male college

students. Another delimitation is the focus only on the experiences of Black male students engaged in a BMI program. While research targeting the experiences of Black male students at PWIs would still help to better understand Black male student wellness, I wish to focus on how programmatic interventions and programs impact the Black male experience at PWIs.

A critical limitation of the study was the focus on one BMI program at one predominantly White institution, specifically BMI membership size, which may have impacted the sample size. Because of a lack of Black male students attending my selected institution, BMI may be negatively impacted by organization size. Additionally, retention rates and students' variance of time within the BMI program impacted their belief of how the program affected their wellbeing. For example, students who have only been in a BMI for a semester may have different wellness needs and perceptions of wellness impact than students who have engaged in BMI for at least a full academic year. Lastly, Black male student wellness within BMI programs has not been heavily documented; therefore, there is a lack of research in the area.

Chapter Summary

This chapter aimed to provide a general overview of the study, including a description of the background of the study, the intended research design, and the purpose of the study. Research questions, definitions of key terms, and the study's significance were also discussed. Background information, historical data, and the selected theoretical framework were introduced but are further explored in Chapter 2. The study's research design is also further discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.

—African proverb, *Black Panther*

Black Men in Higher Education

For centuries, Black men have faced many barriers in pursuing higher education. Although much work has been done to combat the ongoing mental health crisis on college campuses nationwide, students of color, particularly Black men, desperately need focused care and consideration. In addition, much work has been done to address concerns regarding Black male retention, persistence, and support in higher education.

With only 34% of Black males graduating from 4-year institutions over 6 years, marking the lowest degree attainment rate of all students (National Department of Education Statistics, 2019), retention and attrition of Black male students continue to be critical concerns (Brooms, 2018a). After enrolling in college, some of the challenges that impact Black student success, particularly at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), have been campus climate (Brooms, 2016; Strayhorn & Devita, 2010), social isolation (Harper, 2013), racial discrimination (Harper & Hurtado, 2007) and the lack of institutional support agents (Palmer et al., 2014).

“Efforts to enhance the academic performances and educational experiences of Black males in college have exploded in the past 15 years” (Brooms, 2018a, p. 141). Research on the collegiate experiences of Black men primarily discusses issues of their access, preparation, retention, engagement, persistence, and graduation rates (Barker & Avery, 2012; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Palmer et al., 2014; Wood & Palmer,

2015). Most notably, their experiences at predominantly White institutions have gained more attention over the years (Druery & Brooms, 2019).

Particularly at predominantly/historically White institutions (PWIs), research has called attention to several obstacles that Black men encounter throughout their college degree pursuits: feelings of alienation or isolation (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2013), underrepresentation (Palmer et al., 2014), stereotype threat (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001), a perceived lack of faculty support (Chism and Satcher, 1998), and overtly and covert discrimination and racism (Major et al., 1998). These challenges Black men at PWIs face have contributed to issues such as substance abuse, anxiety, violence, stress, social and psychological disengagement, depression, and other threats to their health and wellbeing (Kendrick et al., 2007; Major et al., 1998; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Watkins et al., 2010).

Given these challenges, scholars have supported that racial identity plays an integral role in the college experience of Black men (Campbell & Fleming, 2000; Harper, 2013) and that many of the issues Black men face are rooted in their “(re)position as outsiders on campus primarily because of the continued anti-Blackness that they face” (Brooms, 2018b, p. 60). Furthermore, research shows that Black men have historically struggled with understanding and embracing their racial identity, which has, in turn, harmfully impacted their academic success, social experiences, and overall wellness (Adams, 1999; Anglin & Wade, 2007; Bridges et al., 2018; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Strayhorn et al., 2015).

To address these impediments, scholars have indicated the need for identity-focused support programs for Black male college students, especially at predominantly White colleges and universities (Brooms, 2018; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Strayhorn, 2008). Programs such as these have been established through institutional, state, and national

initiatives, hoping to positively impact Black male social engagement and academic integration experiences while in college (Brooms, 2018a, 2018b; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Strayhorn et al., 2015). These Black male-centered programs are commonly known as Black Male Initiative programs (BMI).

BMIs have gained a great deal of attention in research because of their positive influence on the collegiate experiences of Black college men. Research shows that BMIs positively influence students' sense of belonging, academic outcomes, and graduation rates (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2018a, 2018b; Fullard, 2019). However, existing studies have not explored the possible impact on Black male mental health or wellness while in college or beyond. Given the threats to wellbeing that Black men face in college, particularly while attending PWIs, there is an opportunity to explore BMIs' influence on the wellness of this population.

Black Male Initiative Programs

Through the years, programs, policies, and calls to action to address the needs of Black college men have been administered at the national, state, and institutional levels (Brooms, 2018b; Strayhorn et al., 2015). Of these developments, one factor positively contributing to Black men's success in college is Black male-centered initiatives, also referred to as Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2018a; Fullard, 2019). Responding to the challenges Black men face in college, "a number of institutions created Black male-centered programs as an intervention method to support students' academic success, academic and social integration, and personal development" (Brooms, 2018a, p. 142).

Typically situated directly on college campuses, these programs target outreach, retention, and holistic support for Black college men. “Many of the retention and mentoring programs, such as Brother2Brother and Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), focus on increasing the retention and success of Black male students, especially those at historically white institutions (HWIs)” (Brooms, 2018a, p. 142). Additionally, BMI literature suggests that these programs were primarily developed to promote Black men’s academic success, college matriculation, belonging, identity development, and socioemotional development (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2018a; 2018b; Brooms et al., 2015; Fullard, 2019; St. Léger, 2012). Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs have become recognized as successful social cohesion programs to provide Black college men with support and resources to increase college retention and graduation rates (Brooms, 2018a).

Even though research investigating the experiences of Black men in college has increased over the years, research focused on their lived experiences in BMI programs is much needed (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2018a, 2018b; Brooms et al., 2015; Druery & Brooms, 2019). For Black students, research shows that group involvement can buffer against social alienation and isolation in college, both associated with poor mental health and depression (Brooms, 2018; Fruehwirth et al., 2021). Historically, BMI’s programmatic goals have specifically targeted Black men’s transition to and through college, academic achievement, and social challenges. This study hopes to build upon the literature on Black men’s experiences in BMI programs, adding new considerations for student wellness implications through involvement.

For this literature review, it is necessary to consider two primary frames of thought covered in research regarding Black men’s college experiences at PWIs and the impact of

BMI involvement. These specific areas have been frequently discussed when considering how to better support Black college men through Black Male Initiatives. A better understanding of these helps researchers to better identify gaps in the literature for a deeper exploration of Black college men's mental health and wellbeing. The two areas frequently discussed in BMI literature are (a) persistence and engagement and (b) a sense of belonging.

BMI's Impact on Student Persistence and Engagement

“Retention and attrition are critical areas of concern for Black males in higher education” (Brooms, 2018a, p. 142). BMI programs were intentionally developed to address these concerns by enhancing student access to institutional support and learning opportunities. Through Baker and Avery's (2012) study on BMI initiatives' impact on students' persistence and engagement in college, it was discovered that forming connections and relationships within the initiative and identifying cultural connections such as race, gender, and engagement led to positive retention outcomes. “Outcome research demonstrates a rise in degree completion for students at schools with BMI-type programs” (Fullard, 2019, p. 129).

Applying Tinto's (1993) student integration model as a framework, Baker and Avery (2012) discovered how BMI programs on campus influence students' abilities to integrate into academic and social spaces within their institutions. “Through the program, students were able to build relationships, gain their academic footing, and increase their level of institutional engagement while forming connections with other Black males and faculty and staff” (Barker & Avery, 2012, p. 82). Because of his focus on students' on-campus involvement, Brooms (2018a) noted how “developing micro-communities on campus and gaining access to support and resources through an institution-based program impacts

students' persistence efforts and college experience" (p. 142). This was supported through students' feeling the BMI community was like "a home" (Brooms, 2018a, p. 146), a place to better understand their "responsibilities to the community" (p. 147), and a place to develop holistically as people.

Although participants across studies (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2018a) valued BMI's influence on their abilities to persist in college and make connections, much of the influence discussed is primarily associated with student academic outcomes. While Brooms' (2018a) work does contribute to the literature on BMI's impact on Black male collegiate success from an academic persistence standpoint, he offers additional insight into the implications for future research with this population that could branch into other aspects of the student experience, such as their identity development and wellbeing. For example, he loosely mentions students' "holistic needs" (Brooms, 2018a, p. 153) but does not discuss any relationship between BMI programs and holistic development considerations, such as spirituality, financial literacy, physical health, or mental health, all of which are wellness factors. "Young adults transitioning to college experience psychological, social, and physiological changes that ultimately affect their development" (Mushonga, 2021, p. 244).

Both studies highlight the importance of on-campus, identity- based support programs and connections for marginalized student populations, and recommend future research specifically investigate students' perceptions of their experiences within those programs. For example, participants in a study conducted by Druery and Brooms (2019) asserted that their BMI was "an important space for associating and developing their cultural familiarity, as they had opportunities to connect with staff and peers with whom they shared common backgrounds" (p. 334). Furthermore, participants noted that access to this community and

partners was “critical to their matriculation through college” (p. 334). However, research has not directly investigated nor discussed how this community, nor the connections afforded through it, influence student wellness outcomes.

“Research indicates that social support is critical to improving Black men’s mental, physical, and emotional health, and well-being” (Strayhorn et al., 2015, p. 128). “We urge scholars and practitioners alike to investigate the relationship between BMLP activities and student outcomes...” (Barker & Avery, 2012, p. 84). These considerations reveal a gap in the literature and an opportunity for future research examining BMI programs impact on Black men’s wellbeing. Another heavily discussed aspect of BMI programs, also linked to student wellness while in college, is its impact on student sense of belonging while in college.

BMI and Sense of Belonging

Difficulties transitioning into the college environment can negatively impact a student’s retention, persistence, and sense of belonging. Also, these challenges can contribute to negative mental health outcomes in students of color, specifically Black college students (Brooms, 2016; Strayhorn et al., 2015). Addressing college students’ sense of belonging has been a popular topic in higher education (Brooms, 2018a; Strayhorn, 2012; Strayhorn & Devita, 2010). Research on the experiences of Black college men reveals that engagement in community building and knowledge enhancement activities positively contribute to academic and psychosocial outcomes, as well as a stronger sense of belonging within their college environment while attending predominantly White institutions (Brooms, 2018a; 2018b; Strayhorn, 2012).

Brooms (2018a) sought to better understand how involvement in BMI programs impacted the overall college experiences of Black college men. Focusing on students’

reflections and meaning-making in their involvement with BMI and utilizing sociocultural capital (social and cultural capital) theory as a framework, Brooms (2018a) uncovered four major themes from students' perspectives: (a) sense of belonging, (b) gaining access, (c) academic motivation, and (d) heightened sense of self, or feeling connected to a collective identity and consciousness among BMI staff and peer BMI members.

In a later multisite study, utilizing sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as theoretical frameworks to guide his investigation, Brooms (2018b) found that BMI programs across three different PWIs, regardless of institutional characteristics (size, region, type, etc.), strengthened Black male college students' sense of belonging and cultural wealth. More specifically, findings suggested that BMI programs positively affect Black college men's sense of belonging, racial identity development, sense of social support, and academic persistence (Brooms, 2016, 2018b; Fullard, 2019).

While Brooms (2018a; 2018b) addresses his research questions through participants' responses and his ultimate findings within his studies, the definition of what Black male student "collegiate experiences" entailed primarily translated to their academic success, community building, and graduation outcomes. This definition appears consistent among a plethora of research examining the lived experiences of Black college men in Black Male-centered programs at PWIs (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms, 2016; 2018a; 2018b; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Fullard, 2019; Brooms et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2014). These studies highlight the influence that engaging in BMI has on the social networks, academic persistence, connectedness and belonging, and cultural knowledge and

understanding of Black college men at PWIs. However, there appears to be little mention of how engagement in BMI influences student mental health awareness and wellness outcomes.

Although Barker and Avery (2012) and Strayhorn (2012; 2018) also support that belonging influences various aspects of Black men's collegiate journeys, additional research also reveals a potential association between student belonging and wellness. "Belonging represents perceptions of acceptance and connection and is associated with student wellbeing, academic attainment, and retention" (Winstone et al., 2022, p. 82). Additionally, previous research has also heavily utilized theoretical frameworks tied to these common constructs in educational literature, such as sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012; 2018), social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and integration (Tinto, 1993).

This alone suggests an opportunity for future research to investigate how involvement in Black Male Initiatives at PWIs impacts other aspects of Black men's college experiences like mental health and wellness. Additionally, given the frequent utilization of frameworks commonly associated with students' academic performance and social integration, an opportunity to incorporate a wellness-based framework could be useful in unpacking Black men's holistic college experiences, specifically pertaining to their health and wellbeing.

Research shows that sense of belonging correlates with higher grades, retention and persistence rates, and transition to college life for Black male students (Strayhorn, 2018). Therefore, levels of social wellness can impact student academic performance and college adjustment. However, because of the lack of research examining the wellness perceptions of Black college men, and the dearth of research around their sense of belonging in college, there is an opportunity to examine students' beliefs of their wellness through engagement in

programs that have been heavily documented to positively impact their sense of belonging, engagement, and persistence at PWIs. Several scholars (Baldwin et al., 2017; Brooms 2018a; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Strayhorn et al., 2015) offer implications for future research that examines aspects such as identity development, help-seeking behaviors, and wellbeing with this population. However, a better understanding of wellness as a theoretical framework is required for successful utilization with Black men, given that topics around their health and wellbeing have been historically stigmatized.

Wellness as a Framework

Hettler's Foundation

For years, addressing the mental health and wellness challenges of college students has been an ongoing crisis. Lipson et al. (2015) state that students' mental health concerns are prevalent across American higher education, with many instances of issues increasing but unfortunately going untreated. Through exploring wellness promotion at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Hettler (1980, 1984) provides insight into the influence on-campus units and professionals have on student wellbeing institution-wide. Some of these units include student centers, residence halls, health services, and college counseling centers (Hettler, 1980).

Hettler (1980, 1984) presents a foundational model of wellness that includes six primary domains of individual wellness: (a) intellectual, (b) emotional, (c) physical, (d) social, (e) occupational, and (f) spiritual. Although originally presented as having a holistic focus, its practical usage emphasizes physical health (Myers & Sweeney, 2008). Nonetheless, research shows that Hettler's model can still be useful and has provided insight across various settings. With college students specifically, it has been utilized for health promotion

and to alter student health behaviors (Baldwin et al., 2017; Gieck & Olsen, 2007). Hettler (1980) states that

the academic programs of most colleges and universities could be enhanced by wellness-promotion efforts. Lifestyle issues such as physical fitness, social skills, nutrition, spiritual development and emotional development may be touched on in the academic classroom, but there can also be practical programs that give the students in-depth assessment and empirical learning opportunities for their personal development. (p. 81)

Figure 1. Six Dimensions of Wellness



Note. This figure displays Hettler’s (1980) six-dimensional model of individual holistic wellness, including occupational; physical; social; intellectual; spiritual; and emotional. From Hettler B. (1984). Wellness: encouraging a lifetime pursuit of excellence. *Health values*, 8(4), 13–17.

Brooms (2018a, 2018b), Spurgeon (2009), and Strayhorn (2008, 2012, 2018) support Hettler’s claim that a campus-wide approach to student support positively impacts student academic outcomes, persistence rates, and wellbeing. Additionally, the involvement of university personnel in the college experiences of Black men can positively impact graduation rates. Given this information, Hettler’s (1980, 1984) six-dimensional model can

be useful to better understand Black men's perceptions of wellness as college students.

Additionally, this model could support how institutional programs such as the Black Male Initiative influence student wellness through their offerings and cross-campus collaborations.

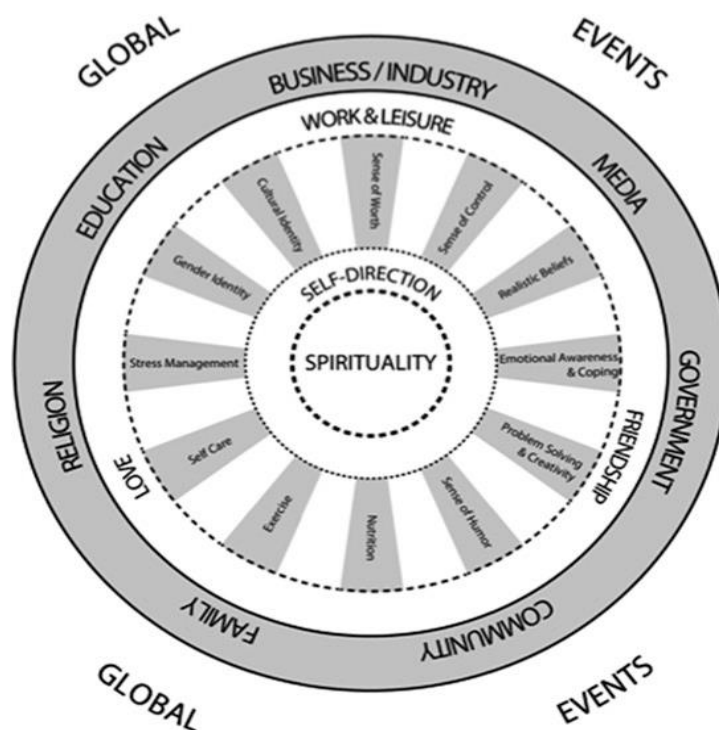
With holistic development heavily emphasized across the counseling field and counselors being seen as “natural partner[s] in the wellness movement” (Myers & Sweeney, 2007, p. 1), it can also be valuable to consider counseling-based wellness models in addition to Hettler's foundation model.

The Wheel of Wellness

A paradigm shift from the traditional illness and disease-based medical model toward an emphasis on holistic health and wellness has gained much attention over the past 2 decades (Myers et al., 2000; Randall, 1996). This shift is important to counselors because the wellness paradigm “stresses prevention, early intervention, and alternative methods of remediation” (Myers et al., 2000, p. 252).

Building on Hettler's (1980, 1984) foundational model of wellness, Myers et al.'s (2000) approach to holistic wellness is multidisciplinary and theoretically grounded in human growth and behavior theories. Originally established by Sweeney and Whitmer (1991) and Witmer and Sweeney (1992), Myers et al. (2000) offer a revised model that can be utilized with a wide range of populations. Myers et al. (2000) define wellness as “a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community” (p. 252). This holistic wellness model can serve as a basis to help individuals achieve greater wellness over their lifespan.

Figure 2. The Wheel of Wellness



Note. This figure displays a visual depiction of Myers et al.'s (2000) wheel of wellness to demonstrate their view of holistic wellness at the individual level. Additionally, the model displays how wellness operates within the larger contexts of family, community, government, media, business and industry, education, and religion. In addition, environmental contexts like global events influence individual wellness. From Myers, J. E., Sweeney, T. J., & Witmer, J. M. (2000). The Wheel of Wellness counseling for wellness: A holistic model for treatment planning. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78(3), 251–266.

The original Wheel of Wellness model proposed five life tasks: self-regulation, work, friendship, love, and spirituality at the core. Later, through factor analysis on a studied sample (Hattie et al., 2004), changes were made to the life tasks to be more inclusive of diverse perspectives and experiences. After modifications were made, the life task of work was divided into two tasks: work and leisure. Additionally, the life task of self-regulation was renamed to self-direction, and its original seven subtasks grew into 12 clearly defined subtasks. The subtasks for the major life tasks of self-direction are (a) a sense of worth, (b) a

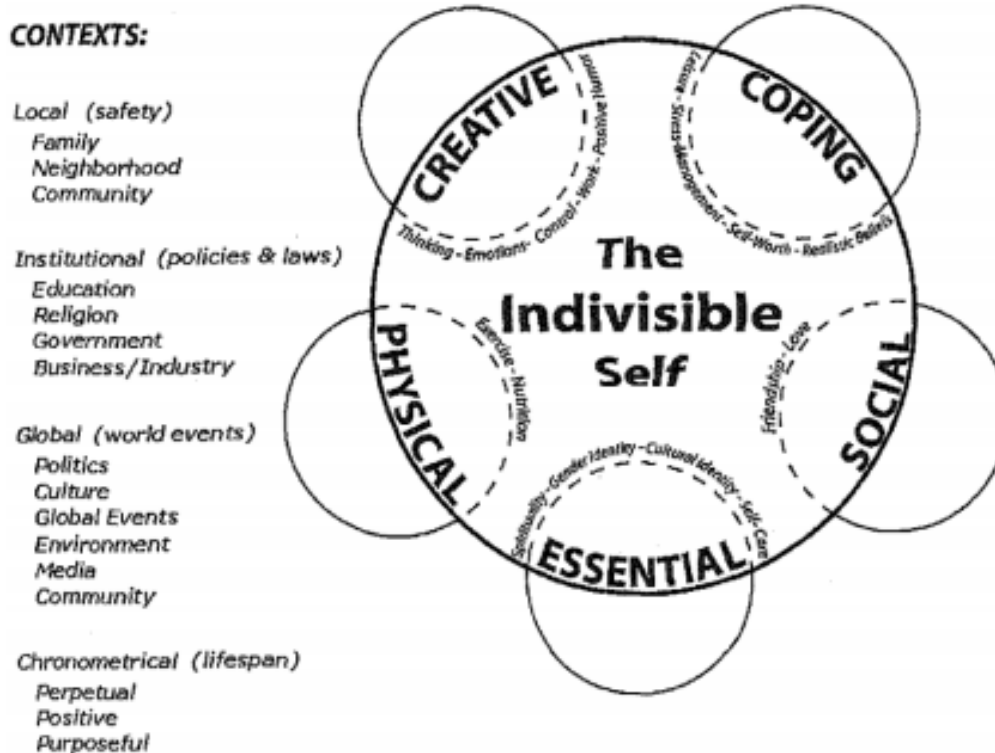
sense of control, (c) realistic beliefs, (d) emotional awareness and coping, (e) problem-solving and creativity, (f) sense of humor, (g) nutrition, (h) exercise, (i) self-care, (j) stress management, (k) gender identity, and (l) cultural identity.

A new addition to the revised model of the Wheel of Wellness (Myers & Sweeney, 2005a, 2005b, 2008) can be found on the outside rim. These additional tasks consist of (a) education, (b) family, (c) business/industry, (d) religion, (e) media, (f) government, and (g) community. While the combination of all life tasks equates to the single higher-order factor of Total Wellness, it is important to note that each task “interacts dynamically with various life forces” (e.g., family, community, education, government, global events, etc.) (Myers et al., 2000, p. 252).

The Indivisible Self

After completing a database analysis of 5,380 adults who had completed the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle Inventory (WEL), an instrument based on the Wheel of Wellness (Myers et al., 2000), Hattie et al. (2004) determined that an updated model of wellness was needed because of difficulties in defining the factor structure. “The new factor structure included a single higher order wellness factor and 5 second order factors” (Myers & Sweeney, 2007, p. 1), with the original 17 components of the Wheel of Wellness serving as discrete third order factors. “In this model, a single higher-order factor reflects the singularly holistic nature of individual wellness” (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010, p. 530). To better explain the wellness factor structure, Myers and Sweeney (2005b) developed the Indivisible Self (IS-Wel), an updated evidence-based wellness model better aligned with holism and Adler’s (1954) belief in unity, indivisibility, and the idea that individuals are more than the sum of their parts.

Figure 3. The Indivisible Self: An Evidence-Based Model of Wellness



Note. Visual depiction of Myers and Sweeney's (2005b) alternative perspective for viewing wellness across the lifespan. Building off the wheel of wellness, they incorporate 17 separate wellness dimensions, five factors, and one higher-order wellness factor. Additionally, the model displays how wellness can be impacted for better or worse by environmental contextual factors. From Myers, J. E., & Sweeney, T. J. (2005b). The indivisible self: An evidence-based model of wellness. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 60, 234-244.

Components of the IS-Wel model are measured through the Five Factor Wellness Inventory (5F-Wel; Myers & Sweeney, 2005b, 2008). Although updates have been made through continued analysis, the WEL, associated with the Wheel of Wellness, and the 5F-Wel are extensively utilized in counseling research (Myers & Sweeney, 2007). "Changes in one area of wellness affect other areas, in both positive and negative directions" (Myers et al., 2000, p. 252). Different components of wellness, or life tasks, gain or lose importance or priority at different stages of the lifespan and across various settings.

Individual gender and cultural differences may also impact the salience of wellness focus areas across the lifespan and contexts. This notion is also reflected in Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) sense of belonging theory. Belonging, viewed as a higher-order need, takes on a higher level of demand as people enter late adolescence and early adulthood, where more time is spent figuring out who they are, where they belong, and to whom they belong (Goodenow, 1993; Sanford, 1962; Strayhorn, 2012). In other words, the level of importance across a person's components of individual wellness changes as they continue to grow, develop, and become more aware of themselves and their needs across life stages and contexts. When applying this idea to Black men attending PWIs, it is vital to consider cultural barriers and factors influencing their definitions of belonging and wellbeing within that environment. Strayhorn (2012, 2018) also discussed how a sense of belonging is crucial in helping combat feelings of potential harm or uncertainty, comparing this notion to the example of individuals from underrepresented or marginalized backgrounds entering majority-dominated spaces. We seek belonging in places and groups where we feel safe and secure.

“Healthy functioning occurs on a developmental continuum” (Myers et al., 2000, p. 252); therefore, learning healthy behaviors earlier in the lifespan can positively affect subsequent development and functioning later in life. Research supports this notion by finding that positive wellbeing during adolescence predicted better-perceived health outcomes and fewer risky health-related behaviors in young adulthood (Hoyt et al., 2012). This idea suggests the importance of wellness assessment and promotion within college populations (Baldwin et al., 2017), particularly those at increased risk of poor future health and wellness outcomes, given historical data and research.

Wellness and College Students

“Young adults transitioning to college experience psychological, social, and physiological changes that ultimately affect their development” (Mushonga, 2021, p. 244). Given the intricate threats to student wellness, including the prevalence of mental health disorders, centering wellness within the college experience has become a crucial mission in higher education. “Promoting wellness within academia reduces disease frequency and enhances overall health” (Baldwin et al., 2017, p. 1). Additionally, Myers and Mobley (2004) state that “a focus on the development of wellness behaviors during college sets the stage for healthier functioning across the lifespan” (p. 48).

Previous studies addressing college student mental health and wellness have given insight into common challenges faced by college students through the utilization of student perspectives and reports (American College Health Association, 2008; Blanco et al., 2008) as well as the perspectives and records of counseling center personnel (LeViness et al., 2019; Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health, 2018). In addition, with efforts dedicated to providing insights into the experiences of undergraduate college students on a larger scale (Myers & Mobley, 2004), much research has been dedicated to the experiences of specific populations of students at heightened risk for more negative health-related outcomes (Christopher & Skillman, 2009; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010).

The unique challenges Black students face navigating college often threaten their health and wellness, positioning them at risk of experiencing higher levels of psychological harm (Christopher & Skillman, 2009; Helling & Chandler, 2021; Mushonga, 2021; Strayhorn et al., 2015). These unparalleled obstacles remain a concern when evaluating the college experiences of Black students. For example, research shows that suicide is the third leading

cause of death among Black college-aged students (18 to 24) (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2013, as cited in Mushonga, 2021). “Wellness, as a concept, captures in many ways the broader definition of health” (Baldwin et al., 2017, p. 2). In a study by Baldwin et al. (2017), wellness factors were assessed in over 200 undergraduate college students attending research and liberal arts institutions. With African American students representing 7.1% (n = 22) of the sample and 63% identifying as female, this provides an opportunity for future research around college student wellness to examine perspectives of specific student populations, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, particularly Black men. “It is important that future studies recruit larger samples of males and minorities to examine critical differences in wellness components as a function of academic institutions” (Baldwin et al., 2017, p. 6).

Even though institutions promote wellness through stand-alone wellness and counseling centers, classroom teaching, and virtual formats, these efforts may not reach those who need it most or provide culturally responsive offerings or services (Baldwin et al., 2017). This suggests that wellness promotion delivered through other campus-based resources, which may not be sought at first glance, could positively impact students’ lives in college and beyond. “Black men, in particular, may refuse to utilize mental health services because of their mistrust of the systems or because of culturally-appropriate and gender-specific needs that require specialized and innovative services” (Watkins & Neighbors, 2007, p. 271). Therefore, for student affairs and health-based professionals to provide intentional and culturally sensitive care and support to Black men, we must understand their unique lived experiences and perspectives of care (Watkins et al., 2007).

Mental Health, Wellbeing, and Black College Men

In examining the wellness experiences and outcomes of Black college students, particularly Black men, much research highlights the varying experiences of students enrolled across various institutional types. Previous literature findings are mixed in determining academic outcomes and emotional wellbeing among students enrolled at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) compared to those enrolled at predominantly White institutions PWIs. However, having a foundational understanding of students' experiences while attending both further informed the direction of this study.

Student Outcomes at HBCUs

Research suggests that Black students enrolled at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have more positive educational experiences than those attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Allen, 1992; Wells-Lawson, 1994). Allen's (1992) examination of Black student outcomes found that students who attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) had a more positive self-image, a stronger connection with their Black identity, and greater academic performance. Additionally, Spurgeon's (2009) assessment of Black male student wellness found that Black men attending HBCUs had higher levels of wellness in measures of friendship, love, and gender identity. Greer and Chwalis (2007) also found that Black students at HBCUs were more emotionally stable when examining minority-related stressors. While these studies highlight positive aspects of Black men's overall experiences at HBCUs, it is important to investigate their experiences further, specifically related to wellbeing and mental health.

Grande et al. (2013) sought to better understand the nature of brotherhood among African American men at historically Black colleges and their perceptions of how

brotherhood may impact healthcare utilization in African American college men. Results highlighted the importance of trust in Black men's bonding experiences and its impact on social learning in college environments (Grande et al., 2013). Trust is also associated with increased utilization of healthcare services, including clinical visits, emergency room usage, consumption of antiretroviral medications, and improved health outcomes (Whetten et al., 2006, as cited in Grande et al., 2013).

More importantly, the findings highlighted trust's ability to weaken barriers to help-seeking in Black male communities (Grande et al., 2013). These findings support the literature highlighting HBCUs as the ideal educational settings for Black men (Allen, 1992; Darrell et al., 2016), particularly given their reputation of having a warm, supportive, nurturing, and receptive environment (Ancis et al., 2000; Darrell et al., 2016; Spurgeon, 2009; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). Yet, 85% of Black college students are enrolled at predominantly White institutions (Lee & Barnes, 2015), a number that continues to increase (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010).

Research shows that regardless of institutional make-up or type, students from marginalized backgrounds have worse mental health and wellness outcomes (Smith et al., 2014; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Strayhorn et al., 2015). Although findings from Grande et al.'s (2013) study offer valuable insight into the lived experiences of Black college men, the sample is limited to students' experiences while attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This idea, along with the rising number of Black students attending PWIs, presents a great opportunity to investigate brotherhood, healthcare utilization, and wellness perspectives and outcomes of Black men at predominantly White universities.

PWI Experiences

While attending PWIs, research on Black college students states that “their position as a minority placed them at risk for higher levels of psychological distress” (Mushonga, 2021, p. 248). While all students experience general academic, social, and emotional obstacles, some of the challenges specific to Black college students include but are not limited to racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, imposterism, discrimination, cultural mistrust, and stereotype threat (Harper, 2015; Helling & Chandler, 2021; Strayhorn et al., 2015; The Steve Fund and JED Foundation, 2017). At predominantly White institutions (PWI), research shows that Black college men reported significantly higher minority-status stress levels than Asian American and Latino college students (Cokley et al., 2013; Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Strayhorn et al., 2015), as well as Black college students attending HBCUs. Minority-based stress can involve stereotype threat, racial battle fatigue, and microaggressions, all of which “have a deleterious psychological influence on Black male collegians” (Strayhorn et al., 2015, p. 128).

Research shows that college counseling centers are experiencing a high demand for clinical services by students, yet they are struggling to address the unique psychological challenges and wellness needs of Black college students (Banks, 2020; Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2018; Helling & Chandler, 2021). In addition, students of color, particularly Black college students, have been harmfully impacted by mental stigma and have concerns about cultural differences, identity, and power dynamics with clinical providers, leading to an under-utilization of college counseling services (Helling & Chandler, 2021; Hunt et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2004).

Adjustment, Coping, and Identity-Based Support

Given the barriers to institutional clinical support, many Black college men at PWIs have relied on identity-focused programming and interventions that promote their academic, career, and socioemotional advancement (Brooms, 2018a; 2018b; Strayhorn, 2012). For example, Helling and Chandler (2021) believed:

With growing awareness of existing identity-based health disparities and inequities on college campuses, there is a recognized need to develop innovative, culturally resonant program models that exemplify inclusive, evidence-based efforts to improve psychological wellness for Black and other students of color at [predominantly White institutions] PWIs. (p. 153)

Goodwill et al. (2018) believed that Black male college students could foster positive relationships in spaces with others who may be navigating similar challenges. “[C]oncerned African-American men have the ability and power to affect the health of their communities by influencing their peers to alter unhealthy behaviors and seek regular medical care, while also teaching them to advocate for their health needs” (Rich, 2000, p. 158, as cited in Grande et al., 2018). Furthermore, compared to their White peers, research supports that Black students deal with stress in more resilient ways (Oliver et al., 2019), including but not limited to identifying specific relationships and support systems, such as other Black male peers, Black women, family members, and Black student-centered organizations (Goodwill et al., 2022; Strayhorn, 2018).

Participants in Grande et al.’s. (2013) study highlighted the importance of identity-based support (peers, older generations) and learning through shared experiences. This offers an opportunity to examine perspectives of identity-based support through the experiences of Black men at PWIs. Additionally, this challenges the deficit-based lens of literature on Black men’s collegiate experiences with more strengths-based approaches. Strengths-based

perspectives, such as wellness, emphasize individuals' positive characteristics and resources that have the capacity to support them (Saleebey, 1996). Regarding their health and wellbeing, Black students have been found to be more resilient when faced with stress, less likely to engage in harmful drinking behaviors, and less likely to develop eating disorders (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Barry et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2019). Highlighting and further cultivating these strengths in Black men have been identified as the best means to combat mental illness, challenge stigma, and promote wellness in their population (Goodwill et al., 2018; Seligman, 2008; Spurgeon, 2009).

Participants in Broom's (2018a) study mention that having a space to call their own at PWIs was "critical in helping to support and inform their coping strategies" (p. 147). Gender-socialized instrumental traits, such as assertiveness and independence, have historically been put on men (Bem, 1984; Grusec & Hastings, 2015; Shifren et al., 2003). This is supported by Goodwill et al.'s (2018) study examining coping strategies in Black college men. Participants shared that they, along with the Black men in their lives, actively worked to "cut off" their emotions, or hide them, when overwhelming situations arose (Goodwill et al., 2018). Helling and Chandler (2021) support this by stating that

the transition to college at a PWI may often involve challenges to existing coping strategies because of changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the social environment, new and more complex role expectations, reduced proximity to family and other familiar resources and differences in dominant norms of conduct and values. (p. 154)

The utilization of disengaged coping mechanisms, or more independent or self-reliant styles of coping, results in poor academic outcomes and low GPAs for Black students (Greer et al., 2015). Additionally, "encountering increasingly complex stress exposures can be

daunting for developing young adults to manage, potentially threatening both growth and well-being” (Helling & Chandler, 2021, p. 154).

This parallels the importance of clinicians and researchers asking intentional questions to better understand the informal and formal support systems and networks in the lives of Black college men (Goodwill et al., 2018). “Practitioners may consider exploring the interpersonal relationships of Black men to gain more insight into their ideas, beliefs, and feelings about stress and coping” (Goodwill et al., 2018, p. 545). Regarding stress, Baldwin et al. (2017) found that perceived stress level is a significant predictor of participants’ social wellbeing. Social wellness is associated with a sense of community, belonging, and social support (Hettler, 1984; Strayhorn, 2012, 2018). Trust, stress, and coping strategies are commonly associated with mental health and wellness disciplines. “Strong social support and effective models can help Black males develop coping mechanisms and achieve well-being” (Strayhorn et al., 2015, p. 129).

Black Men’s Mental Health

“As the cost of higher education continues to rise, identifying factors that assist in student success and retention plays a vital role in the overall success of a given college or research university” (Baldwin et al., 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, Baldwin et al. (2017) state that “holistic wellness contributes to student success, and the cultivation of wellness is a valuable institutional commodity” (p. 2). However, previous literature findings are mixed in determining emotional wellbeing outcomes among students enrolled at HBCUs compared to PWIs (Mushonga, 2021; Spurgeon, 2009). Traditionally, mental health has been used as a catch-all term to reference an individual’s overall state of psychological wellbeing. To better understand how Black college men specifically defined mental health as a construct, Watkins

and Neighbors (2007) found that students defined mental health as having “‘sound peace of mind,’ ‘the ability to see past the present moment,’ ‘making smart choices about your health,’ and being ‘crazy’” (p. 279).

While these perceptions of mental health were defined by Black college men who attended HBCUs and PWIs, it is important to consider that this understanding of the construct was derived through their personal experiences, media, families, and communities (Watkins & Neighbors, 2007). This alone further highlights the influence of lived experiences and social learning in how Black men approach matters of health and wellness in their lives.

BMI and Student Wellness

Literature on BMI programs has frequently discussed their influence on the enhancement of academic success, social engagement, personal development, and cultural knowledge in the lives of Black male college students. Wellbeing is also often mentioned as a focus area of these types of programs in previous literature investigating the experiences of Black college men; however, how these programs influence mental health, wellness, or wellbeing has not been clearly defined or examined. Literature indicates that wellness has a lifelong impact on an individual’s academic, career, and personal accomplishments (Baldwin et al., 2017; Dolan et al., 2008; Gieck & Olsen, 2007; Horton & Snyder, 2009). This provides an opportunity for more work focused on how engagement in BMI directly affects students’ mental health and wellbeing while attending college and beyond. However, before doing so, it could be helpful to examine the indirect ties that BMI programs have to student wellness outcomes.

BMI Provides Access to Social Support

“Research indicates that social support is critical to improving Black men’s mental, physical, and emotional health, and well-being” (Strayhorn et al., 2015, p. 128). BMIs can be used as culturally sensitive programs to provide Black men increased access to diverse forms of social support, significantly enhancing student wellness outcomes. Research has highlighted BMI’s positive influence on a sense of belonging and academic achievement through increased access to social support and social networks (Brooms, 2016; 2018a; 2018b), but it is lacking in addressing how it influences student mental health and wellness. “Research indicates that social support is critical to improving Black men’s mental, physical, and emotional health, and well-being” (Strayhorn et al., 2015, p. 128).

BMI Serves as a Counterspace

With research identifying BMIs as counter-spaces to Black male students attending PWIs (Brooms, 2018a), there is an opportunity to examine further how involvement in BMIs contributes to student mental health and wellness outcomes. Brooms (2018a) states that BMI serves as a “counter-space” (p. 147) for students because of its ability to minimize feelings of isolation and loneliness while attending predominantly white institutions. Counter-spaces are areas or spaces that individuals identify as places of refuge or relief, especially within larger contexts that may reinforce stigmatizing or harmful perceptions regarding their identities (Case & Hunter, 2012; Gunn, 2021). These alternative support structures offer pathways to receiving identity support, affirmation, and validation to counteract the negative perceptions of self-produced and reproduced in majority-dominated settings (Case & Hunter, 2012, as cited in Gunn, 2021). “Considerable evidence now exists that people can draw on social groups in order to maintain and enhance health and well-being” (Jetten et al., 2014, p. 103).

BMI Reduces Stigma

More importantly, spaces that are “culturally sensitive and relevant to Black college men,” developed with clinicians and helping professionals, could “help to combat the stigma commonly associated with help-seeking” (Goodwill et al., 2018, p. 545). This supports the incorporation of counselors and clinical professionals in the development of programming and initiatives catered to the wellness experiences of Black college men. Research suggests that it would “seem worthwhile for clinicians – particularly those who work on college campuses – to create in-person or online spaces where Black men can foster positive relationships with others who might be facing similar challenges” (Goodwill et al., 2018, p. 545).

Although research suggests the importance of informal and formalized group settings and collaborations in the lives of Black men, little is known about how these groups impact their wellness, particularly while attending predominantly White institutions. Additionally, clinical mental health professionals have done little to no research on Black Male Initiatives. “Future studies should examine the relationship between holistic wellness and membership in professional and social organizations among college students” (Baldwin et al., 2017, p. 6).

BMI through a Wellness Framework

Myers et al. (2000) state that they have used the Wheel of Wellness with individuals from diverse backgrounds. In particular to this study, the Wheel of Wellness has been found useful across educational and clinical contexts, being used with undergraduate and graduate students across disciplines and young-to-older adults (Myers et al., 2000). Spurgeon (2009) believed that “third-order factors would provide a stronger understanding of the components of wellness in the academic environment” (p. 35) in his study of the wellness experiences of

Black male college students, given the complexity of defining wellness for African American men in society (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). However, Shannonhouse et al. (2020) note that while researchers may incorporate wellness assessments in their work, it is critical that when examining the wellness of underrepresented groups, wellness is defined through their unique perspectives and experiences.

Empowering individuals' perspectives and voices is also a key factor in qualitative research. "Given the demographic variables that are overrepresented in existing wellness research, it is possible that predominant definitions of wellness are not fully consistent with how the construct is defined by underrepresented groups" (Shannonhouse et al., 2020, p. 103). While some predetermined wellness factors may apply to the experiences of Black men at PWIs, research supports an opportunity for Black college men to provide their personal insights on how they define wellness in a given context and what factors influence it. Myers and Mobley (2004) support this idea by implying that student development and counseling professionals may find it useful to assess overall wellness in students to target interventions that align with their diverse needs effectively.

Many institutions have created BMI programs to better support the needs of Black college men, with hopes of positively influencing their academic achievement, social networks, and graduation outcomes. Additionally, Helling and Chandler (2021) state that "non-pathologizing, non-stigmatizing, non-clinical approaches are an important component of resonant systems of mental healthcare on college campuses" (p. 174). Therefore, spaces such as BMI programs could provide hidden avenues to positive mental health and wellness outcomes for the students involved. Myers and Mobley (2004) add that "college student success courses and campus wellness programs are important means to promote greater

wellness during the college years” (p. 48). “A focus on the development of wellness behaviors during college sets the stage for healthier functioning across the lifespan” (p. 48).

Findings from the literature explored provide strong support for focused attention to the experiences of Black men at predominantly White institutions, along with interventions on college campuses developed to support holistic student development. Examining Black men’s college experiences at predominantly White institutions through a wellness-based lens could reveal that identity-focused programs, such as Black Male Initiatives, influence student development in more ways than meets the eye.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on Black Male Initiative programs in higher education, the experiences of Black college men, and their wellness while in college. Additionally, this chapter provides insight into proposed conceptual wellness frameworks. The research discussed highlights the significant consideration toward Black college men’s academic experiences. However, given the lack of research discussing their wellness, this study attempts to address the gap. Finally, the study’s methods are discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This chapter provides readers with information on consensual qualitative research and the rationale behind its utilization for this study. Readers are also reintroduced to the research questions guiding this study, a better understanding of the chosen method, gain insight into the primary researcher's positionality and are given a detailed overview of the sample population, data collection, and data analysis procedures used.

The Problem of the Study

Research shows that Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs have become known for their ability to enhance Black male student sense of community and belonging in college (Brooms, 2018), suggesting they ameliorate students' stress levels and improve their wellness outcomes. However, research documenting BMI's direct impact on student mental health and wellness is lacking. With a plethora of literature highlighting BMI programs' usefulness in enhancing students' sense of belonging, social support, and academic achievement, there is an opportunity to better understand its direct impact on students' wellness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand factors that impact the wellness of Black college men at predominantly White institutions. Additionally, this study sought to understand ways in which participation in Black Male Initiative programs impacts the mental health and wellness of Black college men. My objective was to learn more about the lived experiences of Black college men enrolled at a predominantly White institution and factors that impact their wellness, and ultimately seek a consensual understanding of how

participating in this student support program impacts or influences their wellness throughout their college matriculation.

Research Questions

This study was designed to answer three research questions to better understand Black men's wellness at predominantly White institutions of higher education. Those questions are:

RQ1: How do Black men define wellness?

RQ2: How does the sociocultural context of a PWI influence Black men's wellness?

RQ3: In what ways does participation in BMIs influence Black men's wellness?

Qualitative Research Design

I utilized a qualitative research approach to gain a fuller understanding of Black college men's perceptions of wellness and engagement in a Black Male Initiative program. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (p. 45). Qualitative research helps us to amplify the voices and experiences of populations that are often suppressed, undervalued, or overlooked. To successfully advocate for more research on Black college men and their wellbeing while in college, light must be shed on their unique, individual experiences through their points of view.

While quantitative research can be useful in helping researchers and practitioners understand statistical analysis, for this study, statistical analysis simply would not fit the aim. "Interactions among people...are difficult to capture with existing measures, and these measures may not be sensitive to issues such as gender differences, race, economic status,

and individual differences” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 46). This study is aimed to draw themes and meaning from the lived experiences of study participants while considering the contextual conditions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Qualitative measures were more appropriate because they allowed for a deeper evaluation of themes, meaning, and cultural considerations specifically from the accounts of the study participants. In addition, qualitative research helps us to overlook “the uniqueness of individuals in our studies” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 46).

Black men have been constantly underrepresented and overlooked across politics, media, and education. Their lack of acknowledgment and recognition has resulted in distorted illustrations of their realities, resulting in deficit framings, misunderstandings, and negative stereotypes about their lived experiences in society. Historically, topics of mental health and wellness with Black men have been stigmatized within their community, leading to many of their experiences and stories going untold from lack of acknowledgment of challenges they face and overcome, downplaying emotional and psychological difficulties, and denial of genuine desire for support through lived experiences (Franklin et al., 2015).

A consensual qualitative research methodology was appropriate for this study because it aimed to expand the literature on Black men by concentrating on Black men as the experts of their lived experiences. The qualitative component of this investigation recognizes the value of Black men’s stories, viewpoints, and lived experiences. The consensual component of this investigation recognizes the value of group cooperation, specifically in data analysis, to minimize researcher bias (Hill et al., 2005; Welch, 2010). The consensual approach helps researchers account for individual biases throughout the data analysis and remain true to the perspectives of the study sample as their understandings of the study sample evolve (Welch, 2010).

“CQR is an ideal method because researchers can interview people to find out in-depth information that cannot easily be found using traditional experimental and quantitative methods” (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 4). Additionally, “CQR is ideal for conducting in-depth studies of the inner experiences of individuals” (Hill et al., 2005, p. 23). Essentially, this approach is appropriate because the voices and perspectives of participants are not a luxury but necessary for constructing a consensus on the phenomena. This approach enables me to obtain first-hand descriptions from members of a population (Creswell & Poth, 2018) regarding their lived experiences and perceptions of wellness to better understand how BMI contributes to their wellness outcomes while in college.

Consensual Qualitative Research

In Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), a team of researchers, who share responsibility for meaning-making, engage in an iterative analysis of the individual internal experiences, attitudes, or beliefs of a small sample of participants. After engaging in individual interviews with participants, researchers analyze themes in participants’ responses and integrate participants’ viewpoints to describe the subjective “truth” of the studied sample. To form a consensual understanding of the phenomenon as it naturally occurs, research team members analyze participant data through consensus meetings, where accountability for diverse perspectives of team members aids in bracketing researcher bias (Gonzalez et al., 2015; Hill & Knox, 2021; Hill et al., 1997; 2005; Welch, 2010).

CQR researchers “acknowledge the existence of multiple, equally valid, socially constructed versions of the ‘truth’ (a constructivist view)” (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 5). CQR is ideal when considering the complexities of Black men’s lived experiences, given the presence of their intersecting identities and their ever-evolving relationships with ever-

changing environments. Because many of their identities, thoughts, and feelings are not readily apparent to the naked eye, CQR can assist researchers in discovering in-depth information by providing a voice to hidden experiences.

CQR has been utilized to explore a broad range of topics across education, behavioral, and social sciences (Hill & Knox, 2021). Topics include but are not limited to urban development, culture (Tuason et al., 2007, as cited in Hill & Knox, 2021), career (Schaefer et al., 2004, as cited in Hill & Knox, 2021), student development, trauma (Gali Cinamon & Hason, 2009, as cited in Hill & Knox, 2021), and health (Brown et al., 2008, as cited in Hill & Knox, 2021).

More specifically, researchers have used CQR analyses to better understand Black men's lived experiences. Some of this research investigates therapeutic support group outcomes (Franklin et al., 2015), sexual safety (Corneille et al., 2008), sociocultural paranoia (Mosley et al., 2017), and social status and upward mobility in graduate students (Sanchez et al., 2011). Regarding the present study, researchers of one study utilized a CQR methodology to better understand factors influencing the persistence of African American gay and bisexual men attending a predominantly white institution (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). Although previous studies have arguably investigated aspects of Black men's experiences that contribute to their wellbeing, there is a lack of research addressing holistic wellness in Black men. Additionally, with few studies highlighting the wellbeing of Black male college students, a CQR research approach can help to amplify a multitude of voices and stories and gain an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences that may not be as meaningfully described through quantitative methods. By engaging with multiple Black college men about their wellness and experiences at PWIs, CQR can help acknowledge the existence of multiple

perspectives of the truth and provide an avenue for their truths to be heard, affirmed, and further explored.

Theoretical Underpinnings

CQR is rooted in a plethora of qualitative approaches. It combines elements of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985), comprehensive process analysis (CPA) (Elliot, 1989), and feminist theories (Belenky et al., 1986; Fine, 1992; Harding, 1991). Of these, Hill et al. (1997) state that the most influential of these theories toward creating CQR was grounded theory, in which they adopted grounded theory's iterative process to coding data (Hill et al., 1997). Primary elements of other theoretical frameworks include phenomenology's belief that data must be understood within the context from which it emerges and CPA's reliance on judges to examine meaning through systematic comparison across data sets (Hill & Knox, 2021; Hill et al., 1997). Feminist theories add a fundamental aspect to CQR's necessity of attentiveness to power dynamics within a research team throughout their work toward developing a consensus on a phenomenon (Hill et al., 1997). Additionally, CQR incorporates feminist theories through its value of respect for participants and the relationship between the research team and the participants (Hill et al., 1997). Understanding the theoretical underpinnings allows for a better understanding of the CQR process.

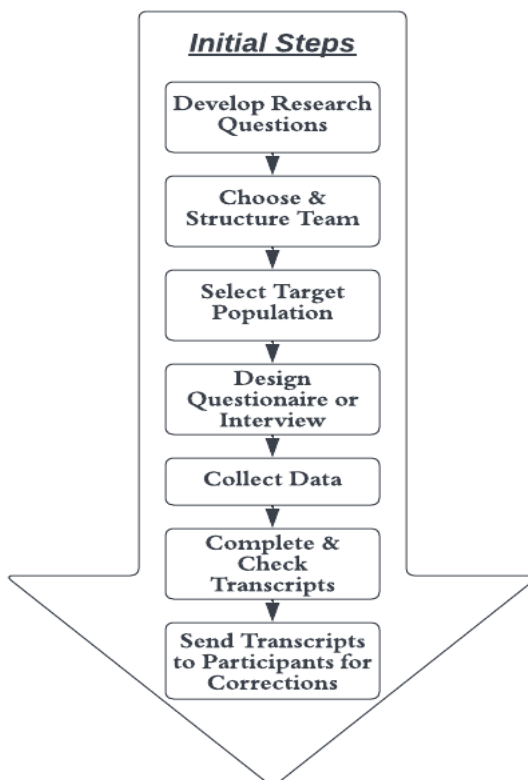
The CQR Process

Getting Started and Data Collection

The CQR data analysis consists of five central steps. The initial step of the CQR process consists of identifying research questions and training (Hill & Knox, 2021; Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Developing a focus topic area is the first step of the CQR process and

is necessary for the development of research and interview questions (Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Before continuing into the data collection phase of CQR, researchers must have a foundational understanding of their desired focus area, acquired through an investigation of previous literature. Additionally, CQR is more constructivist in approach and recognizes that individuals construct their own reality, or “truth” (Hill et al., 2005, p. 4). Understanding and accepting this stance, the researcher can better conceptualize approaching the study, consideration of biases that may arise, and formulation of the research team. Figure 4 provides a general overview of the first step of the CQR process.

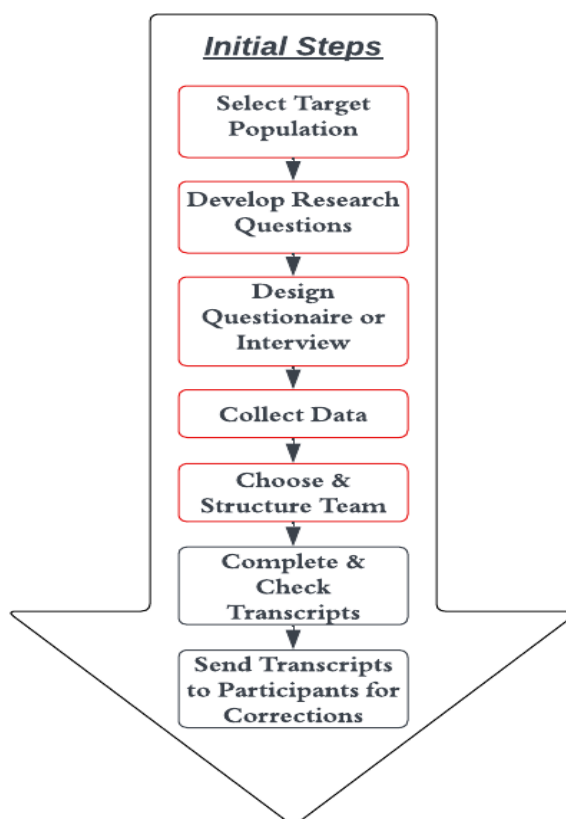
Figure 4. The CQR Process: Step 1



Note. This figure displays the first of five central steps of the consensual qualitative research process. The first central step is comprised of seven sub-steps that are completed in a linear fashion by the primary researcher. These must be completed before beginning the data analysis process with the formed research team. Adapted from Hill et al. (2005).

The authors of the CQR method also acknowledge that modifications to the steps of the study may occur to “fit the needs of the particular investigation” (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 80). Because of this acknowledgment, modifications will be applied to align with the rigor and merit of a dissertation study by the primary researcher. These modifications primarily involve the utilization of a research team only for data analysis purposes and the sole ownership and development of interview questions and population focus by the primary researcher. A better understanding of modifications made to the first step of the CQR process is reflected in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The CQR Modified Process: Step One (Dissertation)



Note. This figure displays a modified version of the first of five central steps of the consensual qualitative research process for dissertation research. In this modification, the study is structured, and all data collection is completed by the primary researcher, who is also the writer of the dissertation. All data is collected before forming the research team and beginning the data analysis process. Adapted from Hill et al. (2005).

Formation of Research Team

Because bias is inevitable in the meaning-making process when examining participant insights, CQR emphasizes the importance of multiple perspectives in the data analysis process (Hill & Knox, 2021; Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Hill and Knox (2021) state that researchers' perspectives inevitably influence our understanding of others' lived experiences. Therefore, having a diverse research team allowed for the opportunity to challenge perspectives and enhance insight and awareness. It's vital that research team members can get along, mutually respect each other, resolve power differences, are critical of one another, and are able to negotiate and resolve their differences (Hill et al., 1997). A primary research team comprises three to four researchers and at least one auditor (Hill & Knox, 2021). Additionally, team members should consist of individuals interested in the primary researcher's selected topic. Buy-in and level of investment by team members can drastically influence the team's success and, essentially, the study's results.

The research team consisted of four members in total. Within the team, three members have research interests centered on mental health, wellness, student development, and professional experiences serving college students who are historically marginalized. The fourth member of the team is an external auditor, who is an expert-level CQR researcher and has published scholarship that aligns with mental health, wellness, marginalized populations, and Counselor Education. Diverse educational backgrounds and professional experiences were considered when selecting team members in hopes of enhancing the richness of team discussions (Hill & Knox, 2021). Before the data analysis process, all members of the research team completed the required Institutional Review Board (IRB) trainings through North Carolina State University and were approved to be involved in this research study.

“Dissertation teams are typically led by the dissertation student” (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 16). The author of this dissertation study is the primary researcher and will lead the data collection process. The primary researcher who led this study is a 32-year-old doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education department at a Research 1, southeastern university. He identifies as a cis-gender, neurodivergent, African American male whose research agenda and professional services center around promoting holistic wellbeing in counseling and student affairs services for marginalized populations, particularly men of color. Additionally, he has engaged in qualitative studies highlighting the lived experiences of Black college men at predominantly White institutions.

Because CQR aims to be an intentional and considerate research method, the research team was purposefully formed with scholar-practitioners who thoroughly understood qualitative research methods, had professional experience serving college-aged people of color, and had graduate-level education and training in multiculturalism. All members of the research team outside of the primary researcher have completed graduate-level training in either Teacher Education, Higher Education Administration, or Counselor Education and only assisted the primary researcher during the data analysis process.

The second research team member, after the primary researcher, is a 26-year-old, cis-gender Black woman who is a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education department at a Research 1, southeastern institution. She was invited to participate in this research study because of her familiarity with the literature on consensual qualitative research. Additionally, she has clinical experience counseling college-aged Black and African-American clients.

The third research team member is a 25-year-old, cisgender Black woman who is a Student Affairs Professional who works in student services at a Research 1, southeastern

institution. She has graduate-level training in higher education administration and was invited to participate in this project due to her specialization in holistic wellness and support services for college students from marginalized backgrounds, particularly Black and African American-identified college students. She has worked professionally in college student affairs for over 4 years and has served Black and African-American college students in residence life, advising, and affinity-based support spaces.

The external auditor is the fourth and final member of the research team involved in this study. She is a cisgender White woman who has a doctorate in Counselor Education. She has published research using the CQR methodology to examine the lived experiences of students and people of color and has experience training and advising doctoral students in Counselor Education programs. Because of her background, experiences, and scholarship, the fourth research team member was invited to serve as the auditor of this study. As the auditor of this dissertation study, she brought a valuable perspective to the research team because of her experience utilizing the CQR method and her interest in the health and wellness of marginalized students.

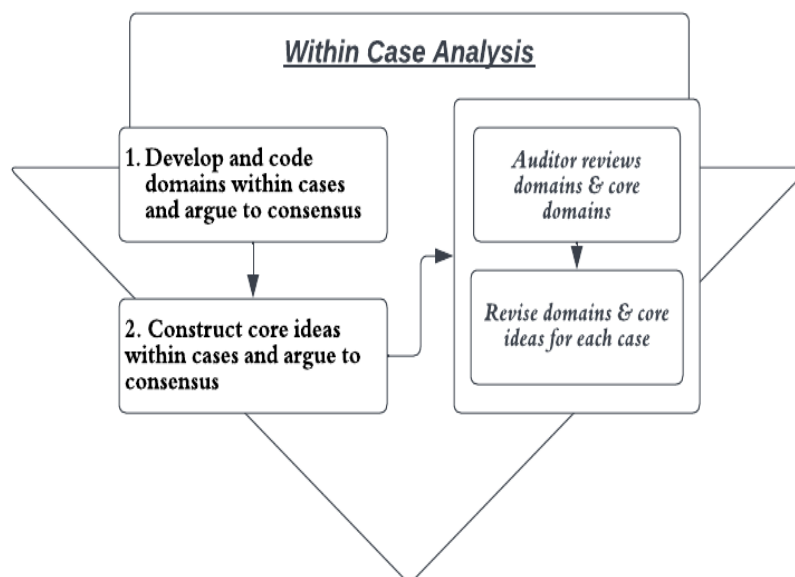
Researcher Bias

The CQR process requires members of the research team to recognize and acknowledge their individual biases and expectations before engaging in the research process. Examining biases and expectations early provided an opportunity for researchers to better understand the diverse perspectives of the team, as well as help members discuss how to “bracket” (Hill & Knox, 2021) pre-existing assumptions to the best of their abilities, as these ideas could have influenced team dynamics and the analysis process. In addition, awareness of these topics provided insight and awareness of researchers’ perspectives and

motivations and allowed for more vulnerability and transparency as the team strived for consensus in the data analysis stage. The research team completed adequate CQR training before engaging in the study.

Data Analysis

Figure 6. The CQR Process: Steps 2 & 3



Note. This figure displays the second and third of five central steps of the consensual qualitative research process. These central steps consist of a within-case analysis of each individual case. The research team must complete a within-case analysis of each individual data set, consisting of domains and core ideas for each case, before beginning the cross-case analysis process. Adapted from Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 196–205.

Within Case Analysis. Following the initial steps, the research team completed Steps 2 and 3, which were (2) segment interview data into domains within each case and (3) develop domains and core ideas for all topic areas within each case (Hill & Knox, 2021; Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). While continuing to emphasize the importance of bracketing in the CQR process, the team began analyzing each individual participant, also referred to as a

within-case analysis (Hill et al., 2005).

Domains. Hill et al. (2005) state that “domains are used to group or cluster information or data about similar topics” (p. 543). According to Hill and Knox (2021), with domains, “we are not describing what we found, but rather identifying the broad areas into which our data fit” (p. 39). While some research suggests beginning with a pre-established list of domains rooted in the literature, Hill et al. (2005) believe that developing domains from interview data can force researchers to remain attentive to participants’ perspectives. This further aligns with the idea that participants’ exact words, insights, and perspectives inform the researchers’ understanding.

Within-case analysis consist of the research team coding data of an individual case and constructing a domain list of 10 to 15 domains (Hill & Knox, 2021). After establishing an initial list of domains from the first interview transcript, the research team can then “apply this preliminary domain list to another transcript and modify it as needed to fit that transcript, given that domains may have to be added, deleted, or otherwise altered” (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 40). The research team then repeated this process with the remaining interview datasets, engaging in a considerable debate as they strove to construct a consensus list for each dataset.

Core Ideas. Construction of core ideas, however, can be difficult to learn for novice CQR researchers (Hill et al., 2005). After identifying agreed-upon domains for each transcript, the next step in the CQR process is to create core ideas by summarizing the content for each domain (Hill et al., 1997). To complete this step, Hill et al. (1997) state that “each primary team member independently reads all the raw data for a domain and summarizes the data into core ideas” (p. 546). Authors note the intentionality of team members individually addressing cases when constructing domains and core ideas before

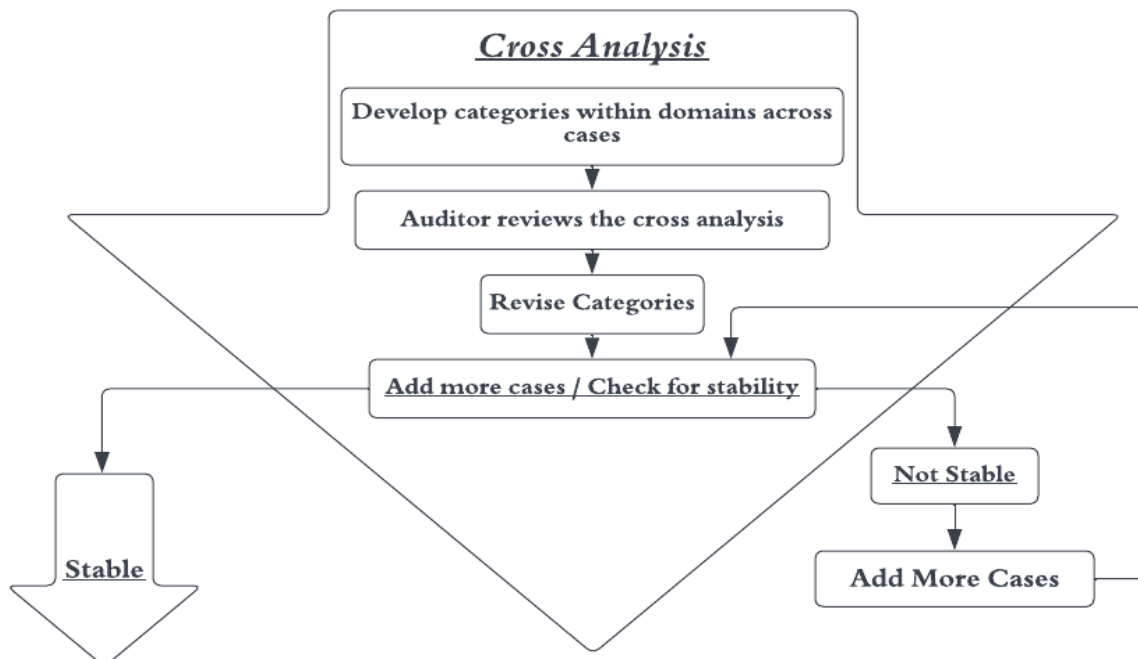
coming together (Hill et al., 1997). An analogy that Hill et al. (1997) compare this step to is the relationship of an abstract to a journal article. In this case, the domain would be the title of the journal article, and the core ideas (succinct summaries) would be the abstract.

Consensus. Research team members will first examine all interview data independently, defining domains and themes for each case. After completing data analysis individually, the research team will come together to evaluate their individual findings until a collective consensus is achieved. The research team began utilizing the consensual team approach to analyze each case's domains and core ideas, reading one interview at a time and not moving forward until achieving consensus. Throughout the data analysis phase, the consensus among the team members is crucial to the CQR process (Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Researchers must engage in an equitable discussion where all team members are mutually respected, valued, and heard to reach a consensus or a common understanding of the data. This process requires team members to engage in an ongoing debate, discussing disagreements and feelings, all while promoting mutual respect, shared power, and equal involvement (Hill et al., 1997). In addition, a consensual team approach helps researchers to support one another in checking for internal motivators to their individual contributions, to represent participants' construction of their experiences as much as possible. "The consensus process is central to the CQR method" (Hill et al., 1997, p. 549).

Auditing. Hill et al. (2005) also state that the early incorporation of an auditor can help maintain objectivity throughout the entire data analysis process. For example, auditors can determine whether (a) raw material is in the appropriate domain, (b) all important material has been abstracted from each domain, and (c) the wording of core ideas are reflective of raw data (Hill et al., 1997). After review, the auditor provided the research team

with feedback to be considered. After reviewing the auditor's feedback, the research team accepted or rejected the feedback and followed up by providing a revised consensus to the auditor along with the original feedback (Hill et al., 1997). The auditor's perspective ensured that the research team came as close as they could to the "truth."

Figure 7. The CQR Process: Step 4



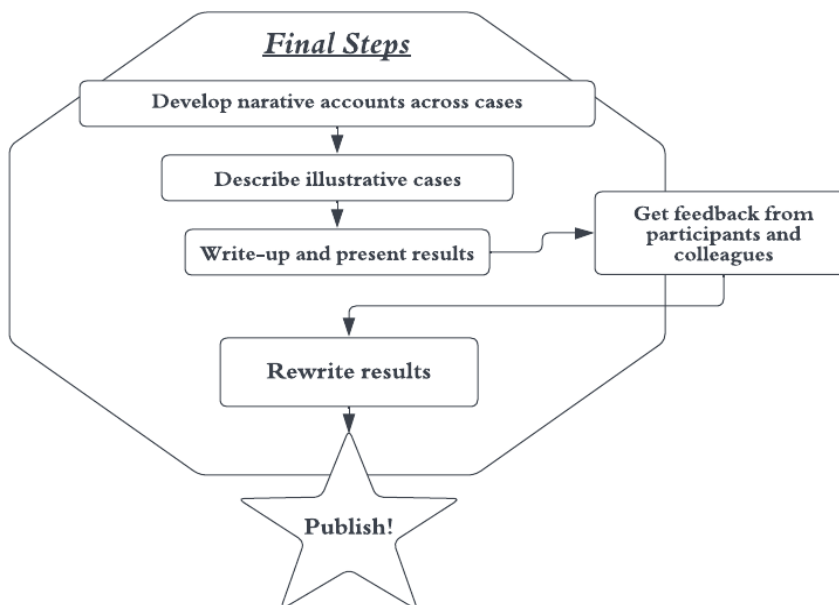
Note. This figure displays the fourth of five central steps of the consensual qualitative research process. The fourth central step consists of a cross-analysis of each individual case. During this phase, the research team completes the cross-analysis one domain at a time, incorporating an auditor for review purposes. Adapted from Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 196–205.

Cross-Analysis. Step 4 required researchers to conduct a cross-analysis to identify common themes and patterns across all participants (Hill & Knox, 2021; Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). The cross-analysis takes researchers to a higher level of abstraction in the data analysis process. In this stage of the data analysis process, the research team examined similarities and differences among cases within the selected sample. Hill et al. (1997)

recommend that the research team copy all core ideas from each domain across cases onto new pieces of paper. To help with accessibility, the primary researcher copied all domains and corresponding core ideas to a shared Excel document for the research team to access. Afterward, team members further examined all the core ideas within domains to determine how they cluster into themes and categories (Hill et al., 1997). Categories and themes, used interchangeably, are to be derived from the data versus being developed from preconceived ideas (Hill & Knox, 2021). The cross-analysis process continued to follow a consensual team analysis approach and was followed by a review by the study's external auditor until a research team-auditor consensus was reached.

Final Evaluation. Step 5, which entails having an auditor review the final material (Hill & Knox, 2021; Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997), concludes the data analysis process. Hill et al. (1997) make suggestions for how researchers can determine how frequently categories and themes speak for the entire sample. This step helps researchers to understand how representative categories are to the sample. For this goal, the data's level of representativeness is defined as general, typical, or variant (Hill et al., 1997). "General" categories acknowledge themes that apply to all cases, "typical" categories apply to half or more of the cases, and "variant" is used to describe categories that apply to two, three, or less than half of the cases (Hill et al., 1997). Additional representativeness categories can be created not to lose meaningful data. These types of categories are those that only apply to one or two cases and are frequently referred to as "other" data (Hill et al., 1997). These terms are primarily used to describe the data based on the frequency of its occurrence, not the merit of its value as it relates to the participants and the overall goal of the study.

Figure 8. The CQR Process: Step 5



Note. This figure displays the fifth and final step of the five central steps of the consensual qualitative research process. The final central step consists of having an auditor complete a review of the material and obtaining feedback from study participants. Adapted from Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 196–205.

After the research team reaches a consensus on the representativeness of the data across the sample, Hill et al. (1997) and Hill and Knox (2021) suggest writing up the results and discussing the findings in ways that speak to the “truth” of the sample. Hill et al. (2005) recommend a full and rich description of the general and typical categories, utilizing core ideas or quotations as examples. Including variants or other data is unnecessary in the results unless the researcher notes an important rare finding (Hill et al., 2005). Regardless of category, data that is determined meaningful through consensus of the research team will be acknowledged and discussed in the results.

Lastly, Hill and Knox (2021) recommend that researchers utilize the final discussion to “highlight the most important findings, relate the results back to the literature, and pull the

results together in some meaningful way, perhaps to develop theory to make sense of the data” (p. 22). Although a research team is utilized for data analysis, for the purposes of this dissertation study, the primary researcher will be responsible for writing up the results of the study and the final discussion based on their individual understanding of the study in its entirety.

Positionality Statement

Olmos-Vega et al. (2022) define reflexivity as “a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes” (p. 1). As a Black man who has attended predominantly White educational settings throughout my K-12, undergraduate, and graduate education, I must recognize how my identities and personal lived experiences have shaped my perspective of this particular research to successfully attempt to bracket my values and biases (Tracy, 2010).

Growing up in rural, eastern North Carolina provided many challenges during my early education. Even though I attended a few schools that lacked classroom technology and ran short of course materials, I most notably remember growing up in a community facing economic disadvantages leading to high crime and poverty rates. Despite constant reminders of high crime and doubts about educational success for Black youth, I faced challenges that followed me throughout my entire educational journey; I was often the only person who looked like me in school.

From elementary school through one master’s-level degree program, I had never encountered a Black male classmate nor learned from a Black male educator. As a result, I frequently felt pressured and lonely throughout my educational journey, leading to many

wellness-related challenges that I was afraid to put a voice on at the time. I faced constant fears of being misunderstood and overlooked. I always felt that because my teachers, professors, or classmates were not Black men, they could not truly understand my current and future struggles, let alone how to affirm or support me.

Throughout my time in undergrad and graduate school, before pursuing my counselor training, I encountered many challenges that significantly harmed my sense of belonging and wellbeing. I never had access to a Black Male Initiative (BMI) or BMI-like program on my respective campuses, and I quickly became plagued with social anxiety, depression, and at one point, suicidal ideation. Fortunately, I was introduced to clinical care that was representative of my race during some of my darkest moments, and I was encouraged to learn more about support professions and personnel on college campuses. Those experiences led me to pursue a graduate degree and training in clinical mental health counseling, with a desire to be the support for young Black undergraduate men at predominantly white institutions that I never found.

My personal and professional experiences have led me to pursue this study, as I have seen the current issues Black men face as professionals and students, as well as the positive impact one person can have on these individuals' lives. I was introduced to the Black Male Initiative program at my current institution as a doctoral student. Spending time with the students and staff engaged with the program, I became curious about the role of the program's existence on the experiences of the young men involved. Reflecting on my own undergraduate experiences, I wanted to explore these types of programs to better understand in what ways they were supporting students. Research reveals that BMI programs positively

influence student academic outcomes (Brooms, 2018a) but does not examine their influence on student wellbeing.

I was placed in a unique situation entering this research project, being both an insider and outsider with my intended study population. Understanding that wellness is a subjective experience, I determined to place my experiences “on the shelf” to the best of my ability, informing my research teammates of my biases and lived experiences. This way, my understanding of Black college men’s wellness was solely guided by their personal stories, beliefs, and experiences. Fueled by my interactions and discussions with other Black college men who have also attended various PWIs across the country, I want to investigate how Black undergraduate men at PWIs define wellness and describe factors that impact their wellness and mental health at these institutions. Additionally, given the existence of more BMI programs nationwide, I wish to better understand how it also impacts their wellness in college and beyond.

Conceptualizing Wellness

Over the years, wellness has been conceptualized in many ways (Adler, 1954; Baldwin et al., 2017; Meyers et al., 2000; Meyers & Sweeney, 2004; Ryff, 1989). Because of its incorporation within the university context and across diverse populations, I believe it is important to conceptualize the collection of Hettler’s (1980, 1984) six-dimensional model, the Wheel of Wellness (Myers et al., 2000), and the Indivisible Self (Myers and Sweeney, 2005b) when exploring wellness in this study. Each model offers valuable considerations when evaluating holistic wellness and can provide researchers with the foundational knowledge of human behavior and motivation.

However, because of the unique perspectives and experiences of Black men in society (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000), specifically those attending predominantly White institutions, I do not believe that one particular model can encompass the definition of total wellness for their population. Variances in wellness across diverse populations have been identified based on a wide range of factors (Myers & Sweeney, 2005a, 2008). However, existing studies have not explored wellness through student perceptions of program membership and involvement. Additionally, no studies to this date have primarily utilized qualitative measures to understand the wellness of Black men as a specific construct.

Spurgeon (2009) recommended that future studies investigating wellness and Black male college students should utilize qualitative measures to capture the “multiplex nature of wellness” for their population (p. 42). With previous research utilizing these frameworks to better understand wellness behaviors with Black men (Uzzell, 2007) and Black college men (Spurgeon, 2009; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010) through a quantitative lens, their application for this qualitative study can benefit current and future literature.

Participants

Background Information

Hill et al. (1997) state that utilizing participants intimately familiar with the research topic will be critical for the success of a study. Therefore, the present study consisted of interview data from 12 participants who were students engaged in a Black Male Initiative (BMI) program located at a Research I, predominantly White institution (PWI) located in the southeastern region of the US. The institution is a large, public university located in an urban-suburban city in a Southern state. For the purposes of this

study, this institution was referred to as Southeastern College, and the participants will be referred to by pseudonyms (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2).

Participant Recruitment

Purposeful and convenient sampling (Weiss, 1994) was utilized to select a sample of participants that were most useful to the aim of the research. Because of my desire to better understand the perceptions and experiences of Black college men attending PWIs with experiences within BMI programs, selecting a sampling method most reflective of their unique experiences was important. Because of the research focus on Black men with such unique experiences, purposive (current or alum BMI members) and convenience (available participants) sampling (Weiss, 1994) was used to recruit participants. Although Hill et al. (1997) recommend random sampling when conducting Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) to prevent unknown biases from entering the study, they acknowledge the challenges of this recruitment method because of participant willingness and availability.

To recruit participants for the study, the researcher contacted two student affairs professionals who oversee the Black Male Initiative program at a Southeastern College. Gatekeeper permission to recruit participants was sought after by the researcher and granted by the BMI staff leaders at Southeastern College. This institution was selected because of its background as a predominantly White institution with an active Black Male Initiative program. Additionally, their BMI program is highly regarded as a successful student support program.

The two BMI staff leaders were informed about the proposed research investigation and emailed a participant recruitment letter, followed by a phone call, to

enhance the likelihood of buy-in, support, and participation (Hill et al., 1997). The researcher also provided their personal contact information for potential participants. The researcher aimed for 8 to 15 participants as that was the recommended sample size for Consensual Qualitative Research (Hill et al., 1997). This sampling size is suggested “so that researchers can determine whether findings apply to several people or are just representative of one or two people” (Hill et al., 1997, p. 532).

With the assistance of the two BMI staff leaders, all participants of the Black Male Initiative program at Southeastern College were sent the participant recruitment letter and flyer via email by the BMI staff leaders. Interested participants completed a demographic screening survey and consent form before being officially considered for participation in the study. To be a participant in this research study, participants needed to (a) be at least 18 years of age, (b) identify as a Black/African American man, and (c) attend or have attended Southeastern College within the past 3 years and have participated in Black Male Initiative program. First-year students were excluded from the study because of their potentially limited experiences with the college environment and BMI at the time that this study was conducted. Participants were also made aware that Southeastern College was a pseudonym used to protect their identities further.

Study Sample

After inclusion and exclusion criteria were assessed, 12 participants qualified for participation and agreed to participate in the study. All 12 participants individually connected with the researcher after receiving the all-call for study recruitment and agreeing to participate. Of the 12 participants, seven identified as current undergraduate students, and five participants identified as recent college graduates. All five of the

participants who were alumni of Southeastern College were no more than 1.5 years removed from the institution.

Table 1. Study Participants

	Academic Status	Undergraduate Major	Years in BMI
Participant 1	Junior	Statistics	2
Participant 2	Sophomore	Chemistry	2
Participant 3	Graduated	Political Science	3
Participant 4	Senior	Aerospace Engineering	3
Participant 5	Junior	Psychology	2
Participant 6	Graduated	Mechanical Engineering	2
Participant 7	Senior	Industrial Engineering	4
Participant 8	Graduated	Engineering	3
Participant 9	Graduated	Animal Science	4
Participant 10	Graduated	Polymer & Color Chemistry	4
Participant 11	Senior	Science Education	4
Participant 12	Junior	Plant Biology	3

Note. Visual of the research study's participants and their demographic backgrounds.

Data Collection

The primary researcher conducted all individual interviews with each participant. Because of COVID-19 concerns, Zoom web conferencing was used to conduct all interviews. In CQR, questionnaires and interviews are the primary data collection options (Hill et al., 1997). Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher the

privilege of developing rapport with participants, as well as access to their facial cues and body language, enhancing the researcher's comprehension of participant responses and holistic engagement (Frances et al., 2009; Hill et al., 1997). Additionally, interviewing allows for "authentic and deep descriptions" (Hill et al., 1997), which may not be gained by completing questionnaires.

In developing interview questions, Hill et al. (1997) recommend researchers immerse themselves in the literature on selected topics, as this will help to avoid repeating mistakes made in previous studies. Having an in-depth understanding of the literature on Black men, their wellness, and their experiences in BMI programs allowed for the development of good interview questions (Hill et al., 1997). Additionally, the primary researcher consulted with two doctoral-level Counselor Educators with experience conducting qualitative research on topics such as wellness, mental health, and college student wellbeing to increase the effectiveness and accuracy of the interview protocol.

After concluding each interview, the primary researcher transcribed each participant's interview responses. After completing each interview transcription, participants were emailed a copy of their respective interview transcript to review for member-checking purposes within one week of the completed interview. Once participants confirmed the accuracy or made necessary changes to their interview transcript, the primary researcher contacted them individually to compensate them for their participation in the study with a \$25 Visa gift card. Interview times ranged from 15 minutes 19 seconds (Participant 3) to 1 hour 22 minutes (Participant 12). After receiving confirmation that all transcripts were accurate from all participants, the primary

researcher contacted their analysis team and proceeded with the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

“In CQR, data analysis is inductive or bottom-up (observing and describing a phenomenon and then drawing conclusions from these data) rather than top-down (imposing a theoretical lens on the data or setting out to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses” (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 8). Data were analyzed using the consensual team-based data analysis approach outlined in Hill et al.’s. (1997) and Hill’s (2012) research on the CQR method. This included a within-case and cross-case analysis of participant interview transcriptions, coding for key themes and patterns to create domains and core ideas.

Before beginning the analysis process, the primary researcher trained all members of the analysis team except the auditor on the CQR method. To be trained, analysis team members were provided with literature discussing the CQR process and instructed to watch a webinar led by the creators of the CQR method. After engaging in these training materials, the primary researcher organized an hour-long team meeting to further discuss the purposes and aims of their study and discuss individual biases that team members would be charged to account for throughout the analysis process. This initial team meeting allowed the primary researcher to reinforce the vitality of uplifting participants’ “truth” while also highlighting the value of incorporating the diverse perspectives and unique expertise of research team members in the data analysis process. The team meeting process occurred four times throughout the data analysis process and helped to check for understanding, biases, and consensus. After completing the initial team meeting, the primary researcher informed the study’s auditor of the team’s process as they began the official data analysis process.

Within-Case Analysis

To begin the analysis process, all members of the research team, except the auditor, engaged in the initial domaining and coding phase of the within-case analysis. All three team members coded the first two transcripts individually and compared their notes to reach a consensus on an official domain list to guide the remainder of the within-case analysis. After receiving the auditor's approval on the initial domain list, the primary researcher divided the remaining 10 transcripts among themselves and their two team members. Of the 10 remaining transcripts, the primary researcher coded five transcripts by themselves, while their two teammates split the remaining five transcripts, with one teammate coding two transcripts and the other coding three transcripts. While coding each transcript, each team member made a note of core ideas that aligned with specific codes within each transcript.

After the 10 remaining transcripts were successfully domained, coded, and core ideas noted, the primary researcher organized two separate team consensus meetings for the research team to meet and discuss each individual transcript, reaching a consensus on the final domains, codes, and core ideas for each. After each meeting, the primary researcher would consult with the team auditor to receive feedback on the team's consensus process. After considering the auditor's feedback on each of the 12 transcripts and seeking team consensus on the proposed adjustments, the research team finalized the domains, codes, and core ideas for each participant and moved on to the next stage of the analysis process to analyze these findings across the entire sample.

Cross-Analysis

After analyzing each individual case, to complete the cross-analysis, all team members (excluding the auditor) came together to now analyze for themes across the entire

sample. The primary researcher took the lead in creating a shared Excel document to complete the cross-analysis. Within the Excel document, each agreed-upon domain was broken up into a designated tab; then, the primary researcher assigned all codes and core ideas from each transcript into their corresponding domain within the Excel document. After breaking apart transcripts, the research team reviewed the Excel document for accuracy. After all data designations were agreed upon by the research team, the research team cross-analyzed participant responses, codes, and core ideas within each individual domain over the course of two team consensus sessions. Through analyzing across cases, the research team was able to reach a consensus on a final representation of the data that is believed to be true to the sample as it relates to the study aims. To check for the accuracy of the team analysis, the primary researcher provided the team consensus findings to the auditor for further review and approval. The data analysis process and results will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 4.

To conclude the data analysis process, the primary researcher presented the results of the analysis to the study participants individually to gain their insight into the accuracy and presentation of the results. Member checking by the participants was extremely important because it ensured that I captured the essence of the messages and feelings that they wanted to get across in their interview responses and that the research team successfully bracketed our biases in our attempt to amplify the participants' voices.

Trustworthiness Measures

Tracy (2017) suggests eight big-tent criteria that researchers should follow to engage in high-quality qualitative research. Of the eight criteria, credibility applies to the trustworthiness of the study. When discussing the importance of credibility, Tracy and

Hinrichs (2017) state, “qualitative researchers attain credibility through the use of thick description, crystallization of data, evidence of multivocality, and engaging in member reflections with participants” (p. 6). They go on to state that “these four practices contribute to the dependability and trustworthiness of a researcher, as well as the expression of an empirical reality that is plausible or seems true and accurate” (p. 6).

Based on Tracy’s (2017) text, I engaged in crystallization through utilizing a diverse research team to analyze the collected data and control for researcher bias. The consensual research team approach involved coding and recoding of data by a research team comprised of myself and two graduate-level professionals, both of whom are scholars and professionals, one with clinical mental health experience and the other with experience serving college students of color in the student affairs setting. Additionally, as required by the CQR process (Hill et al., 2005), a counselor education professional with demonstrated experience serving and researching college students and marginalized populations and knowledgeable of the CQR method served as an external auditor. The research team utilized its diverse experiences and perspectives to engage in the data analysis and aimed for consensus to amplify participants’ perspectives.

Multivocality was achieved by allowing the diverse perspectives of the 12-member sample to drive my understanding of Black men’s wellness experiences in predominantly White contexts. Additionally, the consensus process support efforts toward multivocality as findings of the data are best understood through a consensual understanding of the study sample; therefore, due diligence is paid to multiple interpretations of a phenomenon. Lastly, member reflections were sought after throughout the study. Member reflections were beneficial in enhancing the accuracy of participant feelings and responses and allowed

opportunity for the researcher to understand what the findings meant to the participants. Participants' impressions of both the data collection process and the findings contributed to key takeaways for the future research process that are later discussed in Chapter 5.

Boundaries and Ethics

Each aspect of the study was fully explained to participants (purpose and goals of the study, explanation of data collection and analysis, and presentation of findings). Although there would hopefully not be a breach of ethics during this study, it was still important to consider areas that could produce ethical issues. One factor of this study that could have created an ethical issue was my current relationship with the institution involved in the study. My status as a current doctoral candidate attending Southeastern College enhanced my accessibility to the participants that identified as current students and decided to participate in the study. Because of my desire to work with students attending an institution where I was currently enrolled, I attempted to justify my purpose for working with this specific population and requested gatekeeper permission from the current staff leadership of the Black Male Initiative at Southeastern College. With my research focused on the wellness of Black college men at PWIs, my purpose for working with the Black Male Initiative at Southeastern College was due to better understand the wellness experiences of Black male undergraduate students involved in the program due to the program's goal of promoting the growth and development of Black college men (Smith, 2019).

It was also critical to be mindful of the biases I could bring to the study and the perceived biases that others may believe I have. Identifying those biases early on, throughout the study individually and during research team meetings, helped me to bracket, to the best of my ability, the student and man with similar experiences from the researcher looking to

increase my understanding and raise awareness of support services for a minority group. While there are benefits that my identities and perspective bring to this form of study (being a Black man who has attended PWIs examining the experiences of other Black men with PWI experiences), bias is still worth noting. Therefore, having a diverse group of counselor education and higher education scholars and practitioners involved in the data analysis process of the study helped enhance the reliability, validity, and protection of the participants' voices and likenesses and challenged my bias throughout the analysis.

Significance of the Study

Though much work has been done to combat the ongoing mental health crisis on college campuses nationwide, students of color, particularly Black men, desperately need focused care and consideration. Research frequently highlights the need for mental health support services for Black men while attending college (Goodwill et al., 2022). In addition, Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs have become recognized as successful social cohesion programs to provide students with support and resources aimed at increasing college retention and graduation rates (Brooms, 2018).

A better understanding of the relationship between BMI and Black men's wellness can provide student affairs professionals with an increased understanding of their direct impact and opportunities for program evaluation and improvement in their efforts toward holistic student development. Additionally, research examining how a specific student support program impacts mental health and wellbeing can be useful in determining best practices in preventative programming and generalizability across institutions, professional fields, and academic disciplines. Lastly, counselors and counselor educators may find the study findings useful as they advocate for holistic development and wellbeing in educational

contexts and promote culturally considerate interventions when working with clients of color, particularly college-aged Black men.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 provided additional background context for the purpose of the study, rationale for using the consensual qualitative research design, information on wellness as an interpretive framework, and insight into the researcher's positionality. Additionally, a discussion of measures taken to enhance reliability and validity of the findings was discussed. Finally, in Chapter 4, the findings of the study are explored.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

... And beyond.

—Woody (Tom Hanks), *Toy Story 4*

The purpose of this consensual qualitative research study was to examine the experiences of Black college men who have participated in Black Male Initiative programs at PWIs to learn more about their beliefs of the initiative's influence on their wellness. Additionally, the researcher sought to understand the influence of the sociocultural context of a predominantly white institution on the wellness of Black men, as well as gain insight on what "wellness" means to Black college men at PWIs.

Through reading this chapter, readers will first be provided with background information on the study participants. Secondly, readers will be reintroduced to the research questions guiding this study. Lastly, the results of the CQR process are reported, followed by an analysis of the findings as related to the specific research questions guiding this investigation.

Research Questions

Three research questions informed the creation of the interview protocol. The research questions guiding this study were designed to better understand wellness as it relates to the lived experiences of Black college men. More specifically, these research questions highlight Black men's wellness as it relates to the sociocultural context of the PWI environment, engagement in BMI at a PWI, and the meaning of wellness through their overall experiences.

1. How do Black college men at PWIs define wellness?
2. How does the sociocultural context of a PWI influence Black men's wellness?

3. In what ways does participation in Black Male Initiative programs influence Black men's wellness?

Domains, Categories, and Subcategories

“An initial decision in preparing a CQR manuscript is deciding which findings to present” (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 65). Through completing a within-case analysis of the study sample, the research team determined 12 initial domains that aligned with the interviews of the sample. After completing a cross-analysis of all members of the sample, the research team reached a consensus on three final domains that best aligned with the research questions guiding the study. These domains are (a) PWI experiences, (b) BMI's wellness influence, and (c) the meaning of wellness. As the research team coded interviews, domains were assigned to specific research questions.

Table 2. Domain by Research Question

Research Question	Domain
How does the sociocultural context of a PWI influence Black men's wellness?	PWI Experiences
In what ways does participation in Black Male Initiative programs influence Black men's wellness?	BMI's Wellness Influence
How do Black college men at PWIs define wellness?	Meaning of Wellness

Note. Visual of the study's research questions with their corresponding domains.

Additionally, 15 categories (themes) and 27 subcategories (sub-themes) emerged from the data to answer the research questions. Tables 2 and 3 display the individual domains and their respective categories, subcategories, and frequencies based on the research team's consensus and understanding of the entire sample during the data analysis process.

“Frequency information is noted to reflect the number of participants whose core ideas fit

within each category or subcategory” (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 58). Participant quotations and most relevant core ideas, or “summaries that capture the essence of interviewee’s statements,” will be used to understand each category and subcategory better.

Domain 1: PWI Experiences

The domain PWI Experiences (see Table 2) was used to categorize participant responses as they relate to their overall perceptions of attending a predominantly white institution (PWI), given their identities as Black men and their understanding of health and wellbeing. Under the domain of PWI experiences, categories were: (a) pre-college experiences, (b) transition, (c) mask on, and (d) homeward bound.

Table 3. Domain 1: PWI Experiences

DOMAIN: PWI Experiences		
<i>Categories</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Pre-College Experiences	Lack of Mental Health Literacy	3 (V)
	Words from the Wise	2(V)
Transition	Feeling of Unwelcome	12 (G)
	Feelings of Isolation	11 (G)
	Crash Course: Autonomy 101	11 (G)
	College Wellness 101: You don't know what you don't know	3 (V)
The Masks We Wear	Under Pressure	12 (G)
	Code-Switching	9 (T)
Homeward Bound	Vitality of Community and Belonging	12 (G)
	Ram in the Bush	3 (V)

Note. Visual of categories, subcategories, and frequencies within Domain 1. Categories represent major themes within the larger domain, while subcategories represent subthemes within themes. Frequencies represent the number of participants within the sample whose core ideas aligned with each subtheme.

Pre-College Experiences

When asked about their overall experiences while attending a predominantly White institution, participants discussed the power of teachings or lack thereof, that took place before even enrolling in college. Ultimately, it was discovered that pre-college experiences can influence students' beliefs on college choice. The subcategories that further explain the pre-college experiences are: (a) lack of mental health literacy and (b) words from the wise.

Lack of Mental Health Literacy. In general, participants discussed what wellness meant to them at the current time in their lives. More specifically, three participants discussed not being introduced to topics of mental health and wellness prior to college. Participant 8 said, "Nobody talks about mental health in high school." Additionally, Participant 12 stated, "I didn't know mental health or wellness was a thing until I got here." Participant 11 discussed the lack of mental health literacy from the perspective of their home life as well as their racial background. They stated, "So back in time, student wellness isn't, mental health and wellness, isn't really talked about much in, at least growing up for me in my household or a lot of Black communities." The idea that Black men, and potentially most college students, may not gain an understanding of what mental health and wellness are before entering the college environment could create early barriers to helping-seeking before they step foot on a college campus.

Words from the Wise. "Words from the wise" describes the information that two participants received from parents about the role their racial identity plays in how they navigate the world and how it translates to the PWI environment. When asked about race and its relationship to navigating Southeastern College, Participant 2 said, "I would say it's a product of the way I was raised. Cause it was something that my dad really instilled upon me

from an early age. White people see us as a threat.” When asked about visiting Southeastern College, Participant 4 said, “My mom made me jump on BMI immediately, almost day one, so I wouldn’t be alone. I think we tried to find all the Black people as early as my first tour before I even started school. She made it known I’d be alone here if I didn’t find Black folks, fast.”

Transition

To better understand participants’ experiences while attending a PWI, all 12 participants discussed their beliefs around transitioning into and through Southeastern College as a Black undergraduate man. The subcategories that better explain participants’ transition experiences are (a) feeling unwelcome, (b) feelings of isolation, (c) crash course: autonomy 101, and (d) College Wellness 101: Into the Unknown.

Feeling Unwelcome. All 12 participants within the sample identified feeling unwelcome when entering and navigating a predominantly White college campus as undergraduate students. Participant 8 said, “At PWIs, being a Black man, you just feel othered. More often than not, you’re the only Black man in your classes.” Additionally, Participant 11 stated, “At times, people wouldn’t sit beside me or speak to me in class.”

Feelings of Isolation. Participants’ statements about feeling unwelcome at PWIs contributed to their feelings of isolation. Participant 2 said, “I always see less people that look like me when I walk around campus. It was really having a negative effect on me.”

When further discussing feeling isolated at Southeastern College, Participant 8 said,

I feel like there’s a little bit of alienation when it comes to being Black at a PWI. Constantly feeling as if people around you might be questioning or wondering, like, ‘what’s he doing here?’ or ‘how did he get here? Why is he still here?’

Crash Course: Autonomy 101. For 11 participants, feeling unwelcome and isolated at a PWI forced them to become autonomous quickly in order to navigate the college environment. According to Participant 3, feeling alone with limited support resulted in “forced autonomy.” Participant 4 added to this idea by stating:

I’ve heard some people’s journeys have been easier, which I think is really, really dope because as long as you get it, go do your thing. But yeah, it definitely could have been easier for me if I just knew what was up a lot earlier. I just didn’t know. I had to figure it out on my own.

Participant 4 also stated that “The responsibility is on students to find the help that they need in college, which adds an additional layer of stress and pressure.” Also speaking to autonomy, Participant 13 said, “I was misguided in a lot of ways by my advisor and in a way left on my own to figure shit out.” Participant 10 stated, “I’d say it has been challenging. I think that’s the one word I’m starting to, I guess realize and use as I reflect on my time. It’s hard to find your footing alone while you’re under the stress of everything else as well.”

College Wellness 101: Into the Unknown. Tying back to the category of Pre-College Experiences, 3 participants discussed not understanding what support was or how to seek it during the college transition period as well as throughout much of their earlier years at Southeastern College. Participant 12 stated, “I was going through a lot, and all I had to do was say something.” Participant 5 reported, “College students need guidance on what wellbeing is early. Could’ve saved me a lot of headache, mentally, emotionally, and academically.”

The Masks We Wear

The category “The Masks We Wear” refers to participants’ feelings, perceptions, and strategies as Black men navigating the PWI environment after officially transitioning into college. “Wearing masks” was discussed by all participants in the sample as a survival or

protective strategy for Black men in predominantly white spaces. The subcategories that make up the survival period are (a) under pressure and (b) code-switching.

Under Pressure. All 12 participants in the sample identified feeling under pressure as Black men attending PWIs. Participant 2 reported:

Even with all the different things I do, academically and non-academically, I still have that nagging sense of ‘I got to be careful what I say. I gotta watch what I say.’ Things of that nature. Or constantly wondering, ‘How am I presenting? What do people think of me?’

When speaking about the pressure that they feel as a Black man at a PWI, Participant 8 stated, “Juggling multiple responsibilities and identities while also trying to adjust to a brand new space. Make friends. Get good grades. Prove people wrong. On top of all of that, you got life still happening. Shit is exhausting.” When asked about their beliefs, Participant 5 stated,

The vibe a PWI gives off, especially with being a student of color, you have to work two times harder than your average White student who’s sitting right next to you. That’s where that sense of being drained comes from as well, just going throughout the day, knowing ... or not knowing, but just feeling like I have to prove myself an extra length than those white kids surrounding me.

Code-Switching. Of the sample, nine participants identified with code-switching and provided core ideas that directly acknowledged protective strategies they engage in as Black men to avoid potential harm. Participant 1 stated, “I’m able to just switch whenever, if I need to, to be able to talk to different types of people. I’m always alert and on a swivel.” Participant 2 followed by adding, “Black men are constantly perceived as a threat everywhere, but especially here. You have to learn what will keep you safe in different spaces.” When discussing protecting themselves at a PWI, Participant 13 said,

A lot of teachers see you as a number in the class unless you make yourself more. I kind of chose to make myself a number so that I can avoid any potential harm. I’m not even trying to set myself up to be pissed. Just keep things business cause that’s what it is. Business.

Homeward Bound

The final category that discusses Black men's PWI experiences as it relates to their mental health and wellness is Homeward Bound. This category represents the theme of Black men at PWIs moving from a state of surviving to thriving, and finding spaces and resources that can support them during their college experience at PWIs. The subcategories that make up this category are (a) vitality of community and belonging and (b) ram in the bush.

Vitality of Community and Belonging. All 12 participants in the sample talked about the importance of finding a sense of community and belonging for Black men at PWIs. Participant 1 stated, "At a PWI, it's really hard to find niche roots or groups you're comfortable in, usually as a Black man. Finding them, and finding them early, is key to making it." Participant 9 mentioned, "It [PWI] can be a bad place very well if you can't find your community if you can't find that reason to keep going—it will chew you up and spit you out with a quickness." Participant 9 goes on to state, "I really struggled to find myself at first. Once I found my niche, I was able to find my footing." Participant 4 said, "As a Black man specifically, I finally found my people once I found BMI."

"Ram in the Bush": Participant 11. Participant 11 referred to a "ram in the bush" as Black-identified staff and faculty at PWIs that have helped support Black men by connecting them to various resources on campus. Of the sample, three participants identified with the idea of the value and importance of Black staff and faculty at PWIs for Black college men. Participant 2 stated,

As a Black man at [Southeastern College], It's been kind of eye-opening cause I was fortunate enough to have other Black faculty and staff that really cared about me. [Faculty member] in the College of Sciences. She's awesome. [Staff member] before he left, and he's awesome. So, there are people that were looking out for me before I even realized I needed that support system. And so, since then, I've been able to do the same for a lot of my peers. Get them connected to other Black faculty and staff,

get them to Black events. They would point me to spaces for “us.” Cause a lot of times, [Southeastern College] can feel like it wasn’t for me. But those folks reminded me that I deserved to be here. You know, right when shit is getting rough, and you feel like you’re slipping through the cracks, here comes a Black professor, a Black staff member, lifting you up, giving what you need to keep going. Like a ram in the bush, if you will.

In addition to this, Participant 3 reported, “If you can find that one Black staff member or faculty member right when you get to school, they’ll more than likely help get you connected to some community. They want to see you make it and get what you need. They want to see you win.”

Domain 2: BMI’s Wellness Influence

The domain BMI’s Wellness Influence (see Table 3) was used to categorize participant responses as they relate to their overall perceptions of how their institution’s Black Male Initiative program influenced their wellness while attending a predominantly white institution (PWI). Under the domain of BMI’s Wellness Influence, categories were: (a) access, (b) counterspace, (c) pay it forward, and (d) lifelong connection and learning.

Table 4. Domain 2: BMI’s Wellness Influence

DOMAIN: BMI’s Wellness Influence		
<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Access	Peer Support & Sense of Community	12 (G)
	Dope Roommates	9 (T)
	Leadership & Staff Support Pt. 1: A Catalyst	8 (T)
	Leadership & Staff Support Pt. 2: A Double-Edged Sword	4 (V)
Counterspace	Home Away from Home	12 (G)
	BMI is the People & BMI is the Location	12(G)
Building Bridges	All for One, One for All	12 (G)
	Peer Mentorship	5 (V)
“...And Beyond.”	Exploration of Self & Worldview	7 (T)
	Wellness Post-Grad	5 (V)

Note. Visual of categories, subcategories, and frequencies within Domain 2. Categories represent major themes within the larger domain, while subcategories represent subthemes within themes. Frequencies represent the number of participants within the sample whose core ideas aligned with each subtheme.

Access

When participants were asked about BMI’s influence on their wellness while attending their institution, all participants believed that it provided them with increased access to a number of resources that influenced their wellbeing to varying degrees. Access is broken up into four subcategories: (a) community and peer support, (b) dope roommates, (c) staff support: a catalyst, and (d) staff support: a double-edged sword.

Peer Support and Sense of Community. All 12 respondents discussed how BMI positively influenced their wellbeing by providing access to a greater sense of community

and support from peers who would understand the shared experience of being a Black man at a PWI. Participant 2 said,

BMI has given me that constant social wellness. Of course, I still wanted to find my group outside of BMI, but again, there were always people I got to come back to. So, for me, just finding that social outlet really helped my wellness there. It gave me a community to belong to.

When asked about the sense of community that he felt in BMI, Participant 5 said, “There’s always someone I can rely on or go to when I am in need.” Regarding community and belonging, Participant 12 stated, “So BMI, I feel like community is very important to wellness because for me personally, my friends have definitely saved me from a lot of things I would say.” Participant 10 added,

I love BMI just off of the strength of what they’re doing for us. The strength of the community. I know people had my best interests at heart. Some of the mentors would have semester check-ins or stuff like that with us directly, or I know at that time I was trying to cross my frat, so even then I was under the weather trying to keep my head straight with all going on. He would still try to go out of the way to try to schedule that one-on-one meeting to just check in on me. And then the people that are actually working for campus that are involved with the village also have the best intentions at heart. They really took care of me and everybody else.

Dope Roommates. Of the sample, nine participants added that in addition to being provided with access to community and peer support, BMI also provided them access to roommate relationships that positively affected their wellness during college and beyond. Participant 4 stated, “My roommate will always be my roommate. He’s like my brother. Now and forever. Even though we’re no longer roommates, he will always be my only roommate. And everybody knows that. He says the same about me!” Participant 10 stated, “So I actually came into BMI, and I met a roommate in BMI, and we just hit it off instantly. So, it was just nice to have that during my time in college.” Lastly, when Participant 12 was asked to explain the impact of his roommate on his wellness while at Southeastern College, he said,

“My roommate was the reason I joined BMI and have stayed in BMI. Hell, he’s the reason I’ve even made it at [Southeastern College].”

Staff Support as a Catalyst. When discussing additional forms of access provided by BMI outside of the student community, 8 participants discussed the wellness influence that BMI promoted through providing access to support from the staff of the institution. Participant 4 stated, “If you needed to talk about something, JL was there for you.” Participant 8 mentions feeling that their wellness was “accounted for” by staff and goes on to state, “In BMI, you really can’t hide or avoid mental health and wellness because there, unlike at a PWI, you’re accounted for. JL, CJ, or somebody will seek you out.” Participant 7 said that access to staff in BMI positively influenced their wellness because staff leadership “helped protect me from myself and change some unhealthy coping patterns into healthy and sustainable behaviors.” Participant 4 also attributes their positive roommate experience to the staff support provided by BMI and said,

To the chef, compliments. He did it. He did his thing when he set me and my roommate up. That was a very, very great intro to college for me living with the first roommate that I had. That’s what I’ve had so far, by the way, not going to hold you. Like me and him, we was tight. It was cool. We had code words. It was lit. We was cool. We knew what it was. JL looked out for me a lot and it supported me in ways that you can’t even imagine.

Staff Support as a Double-Edged Sword. While many participants believed the support from staff that they received through BMI positively affected their wellness, four believed that the support provided by BMI staff negatively impacted their wellbeing as well. To address this, Participant 11 stated,

BMI is not as inclusive of degree pathways with less representation of Black men. Like mine, in medicine. They [BMI leadership] typically cater to what is most represented in BMI, usually business. Which I totally understand. It can just be harder to get mentorship, social capital, and support if you’re not some of the careers and majors that BMI is primarily made up of.

Participant 2 said that “When leadership changed, a lot of BMI changed. Our mental health took a hit in a lot of ways.” Participant 13 stated,

What’s important to some folks isn’t important to everyone. Some [BMI staff] will go out of their way to find you and check-in. Others, you have to almost become a priority for them. Some try to include everyone, and others will wait for volunteers. They just have really different styles and perspectives of supporting students.

Participant 4 believed,

The culture of BMI is spearheaded based on what is important to the current leader of the initiative. And wellness to them ain’t always wellness to everybody here. It’s easy to not feel seen or included if y’all just don’t agree on what makes you good, and it’s nobody’s fault. That’s just how it is, sometimes.”

Counterspace

When further discussing BMI’s influence on participants’ wellness during their time attending a PWI, the entire sample believed that it provided Black men with a counterspace within their institution. The category counterspace is better explained through two subcategories: (a) home away from home and (b) BMI is the people, and BMI is the location.

“Home Away from Home,” Participant 4. All 12 participants in sample believed BMI positively influenced their mental health and wellness by providing them with a “home away from home,” while attending Southeastern College. When discussing the wellness effects of BMI being a home away from home, Participant 12 said, “Every Black man is welcomed here.” Participant 8 had this to say:

But something about BMI in particular is. It is about the Black male experience and a lot of those issues we’re discussing constantly brought up. And so, even though you’re feeling these things from a day-to-day basis, you’d always have some people around you where you can share the experience with or you can understand what they’re also going through too, or how they’re being affected by things as well. I mean, it’s important to have that if you’re going to a PWI because the easiest thing you can do is to fall into just being isolated and just feeling frustrated, and the situation just doesn’t change if you don’t really don’t really have any outlets or anything like that. So I think BMI is a really good outlet and also nice, a good home or something.

Participant 5 reported, “BMI is like a home away from home for Black men on a PWI campus. Especially here at [Southeastern College], where we already feel like we don’t belong. In BMI, we all belong.” Participant 4 said, “BMI allowed me to be myself. It allowed me to breathe. It was my home away from home.” When explaining BMI’s wellness impact further, Participant 9 stated, “The right community can boost your wellness to unimaginable heights. That’s what BMI was for many of us.” To explain how BMI’s wellness influence provided a home away from home for Black men, Participant 1 said, “BMI is a second family.”

BMI is a Community, and BMI is a Location. From the perspective of physical space and location, all 12 participants felt that BMI positively influenced their wellness by providing a physical space for students to assemble. When discussing the physical nature of the BMI space, Participant 4 said, “I’m telling you, dude. BMI was wellness at a PWI! BMI was everything. Whatever you needed was probably right in [Building name].” Participant 2 reported,

The sense of community, I think, was something that I definitely utilized and needed. Just because when I needed a break from that grind, even if it was for a little bit, I was 9 times out of 10 with them. That’s where I could chill out for a second and just be a person.

When discussing the space provided by BMI, Participant 11 talked about their experiences during the 2016 presidential election. They stated,

I remember being the only Black person in a couple of my classes. And so it was just a weird feeling. But I will say coming back [to BMI physical location] and being able to decompress some with BMI was really good. Just little things like that. Whenever I would get overwhelmed or you would feel isolated or alone in class, you’d come back to BMI in [building name] and be like, “alright, how are y’all doing?” And you could be received instantly, and see other people have a similar experience to an extent.

In discussing the wellness influence that BMI made on students through providing access to a physical space, some participants discussed their living arrangements and how

BMI positively enhanced their wellness by providing them with their own dedicated living rooms within a residence hall. To better understand the living arrangements provided by BMI, Participant 1 reported,

‘Cause one, without BMI, I wouldn’t have this big of a room, probably. I would be somewhere else, with somebody I probably wouldn’t even mesh with. That’s one thing that’s a big part of BMI: we get these hotel style dorm rooms, which is nice to have our own space and another, we’re also guaranteed to room with another black male roommate; someone we can relate to. Without that, my mental health would probably be in the gutter right now.

To further explain how the physical location of BMI, as well as the living spaces proved by the initiative, served as a counterspace and influenced student wellness, Participant 5 said:

Being within BMI really helped my wellness because it helped me escape from the day-to-day challenges, from the day-to-day pitfalls, that I may have had at [Southeastern College]. Because, like I said, I’ll go throughout the day, go to class, do my work and all, and I’ll have different things going throughout the day that may make it go good, make it go bad, whatever. But no matter whenever I get back to [BMI’s physical location], I know that there’s just that sense of just a weight lifted off your shoulder because I can just relax. I can just be me. I can really calm my mental state. Where I live, there’s only the people that really get me. Therefore, all the worries I’ve been thinking about earlier, the thoughts in my head, I can calm it and suppress it just from being within that environment. Or even if it’s to the point where it’s bothering me so much, I know there’s someone there who I can talk with or someone there who may have something similar going on that I can talk with and we can discuss ways that help them and ways that may possibly help me as well.

To also give an understanding of the wellness influence of BMI’s physical location, Participant 10 said, “Not staying in the village, if you decide to stay away from [building name], you don’t get to feel all the positive effects of the BMI space. You are kind of distant from the people and community.”

Building Bridges

The third category the participants discussed related to BMI’s wellness influence is the idea of shared accountability for one another among participants and BMI members. The

category of Building Bridges is better understood through two subcategories: (a) all for one and one for all, and (b) peer mentorship.

All for One, and One for All. All 12 participants in the sample believed BMI influenced their wellness through promoting accountability and responsibility for their own wellbeing, but more importantly, the wellbeing of others within the initiative. Participant 8 discussed this by saying, “BMI impacted my wellness because there’s a mood of I’m my brother’s keeper in BMI. One man’s struggle is another man’s struggle. So we are accountable to each other to make sure we are both good.” Participant 11 said,

I didn’t have to be invincible, and then I didn’t have to have that face every time I go somewhere. I could be myself. I could be upset. I can be human. And I think BMI influenced my understanding of wellness by teaching me that I could fully embrace some of that stuff. Embrace all of me. It was important to make sure everyone got that. So once you get it, you help someone else get there.

When explaining their lens of wellness and accountability within BMI, Participant 12 stated,

But then I came into BMI and learned that there’s a multitude of ways to be a Black man and still be successful, be happy, and still be the person that you are. So BMI taught me that. And again, like I said, that learning how to love myself fully and be who I am fully, allows me to do that for my residents so they can go out into the world, still be who they are as a person and still be successful and be accepted into the world. And so that’s kind of how it definitely has made a mark on my wellbeing.

Peer Mentorship. Further discussing the idea of accountability, five participants talked about the importance of peer mentorship as it relates to student wellness in college, but more specifically, at a PWI for Black men. Participant 9 said,

Passing down knowledge and experiences, and being inviting, is going to be the big save for all of us. We all go through life, but once we start gatekeeping things, that’s when this journey gets difficult, and we begin to hold each other back.

Participant 2 said,

Before JL left, he had appointed specific people to hold the [student] mentor roles and serve as a bridge to the next generation, so to speak. In BMI, mentorship is critical because students get to help other new students learn how to take care of themselves and make it at [Southeastern College]. As a mentor, you really feel like you’re getting

chosen to lead the next generation. But the mentorship component in BMI looks different now. Hopefully, it'll get back to what it was.

“... And Beyond”

The fourth and final category that further explains BMI's wellness influence on participants' lives and the college experience is “... And Beyond” (Nielsen et al., 2019), which emphasizes participants' engagement in lifelong learning, insight, and connection related to BMI and their wellbeing. In this category, participants addressed their perception of BMI's influence on their wellbeing as it relates to their lives post-graduation from undergrad. This category is better understood through two subcategories: (a) exploration of self and worldview and (b) wellness post-graduation.

Exploration of Self and Worldview. Of the sample, seven participants discussed how BMI influenced their wellbeing through promoting further exploration of self in their personal lives and broadening their worldview of what wellness means to them as Black men within the larger context of society. Regarding their worldview, Participant 12 said, “In BMI, I learned that there's no one way to be a Black man.” Participant 2 said, “BMI was a good launching pad for me to see Black men winning. All types of Black men being successful and learning more and more about themselves each day.” Related to wellness, Participant 5 reported,

There's more to it than meets the eye. There's a lot more happening behind the scenes, and it can take time to understand that. I've graduated now, and I am still learning so much about myself, but BMI helped me get started.

Participant 11 stated,

So, BMI kind of gave me that like, all right, it's okay for me to feel these emotions. It's okay to, I dunno, learn, grow, get help. It's all okay. You can't do it all because before you're kind of taught you have to do it all, keep everything in house and there's certain things you just can't keep in house and you have to be okay with not being okay and going to someone. And so I think it opened my eyes to that a lot being

in BMI, and kind of changed my view on mental health as a person as whole and how you function because it plays a major role in your life.

Wellness Post-Grad. This final subcategory speaks more towards BMI's influence on participants' wellness after graduating from undergrad. Of the sample, four participants believed that BMI would influence or has influenced their lives and wellness after graduating from Southeastern College. When considering how BMI influenced their wellbeing post-graduation, Participant 5 said,

The question, it definitely made me think about just the time being out of college. I've gone through some ups and downs. I've had some times where I needed some help and some insight on my mental (health). But just knowing and going and thinking right off the bat who I'd go to or right off the bat that first point of contact is always someone I know from BMI, or always someone I know who I've connected with from BMI. May not have been within BMI specifically, but have still have an impact within BMI. BMI gave me a lot of what my support system was in college, and a majority of my support system outside of college.

Participant 11 stated, "Because of BMI, I learned you have to figure out what works best for you, AND you have to actively try to prioritize your mental health." Participant 2 said that

In college, BMI has helped me be accepting of change. When those changes come, we're not static about it. And so, change is good. Change is necessary. And so when those changes finally start happening later in life, whether it's spurred by me or spurred by Father Time, I'm going to have to accept and embrace it as it is.

Domain 3: Meaning of Wellness

The final domain, Meaning of Wellness (see Table 4), was used to categorize and better understand participant responses as they relate to their overall perceptions of what wellness means to Black undergraduate men. The Meaning of Wellness domain is better defined through one main category: balance. However, this one category is better understood through three subcategories. Those subcategories are (a) breathing, (b) becoming, and (c) being.

Table 5. Domain 3: Meaning of Wellness

Domain: Meaning of Wellness		
<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Balance	Breathing	8 (T)
	Becoming	8 (T)
	Being	6 (V)

Note. Visual of categories, subcategories, and frequencies within Domain 3. Categories represent major themes within the larger domain, while subcategories represent subthemes within themes. Frequencies represent number of participants within the sample whose core ideas aligned with each subtheme.

Balance

When asked about the meaning of wellness, all 12 participants in the sample defined wellness from their perspectives of Black men as balance. However, based on the sample used in this study, their definition of balance is better understood through three subcategories: (a) breathing, (b) becoming, and (c) being.

Breathing. Based on the sample, the concept of breathing was defined as an integral component of wellness for Black men by 8 participants. Breathing was discussed in a literal sense by Participant 4, where he stated, “I feel like wellness means being able to ... It’s very simple, but wellness is breathing. Being able to breathe and flow.” He continues by adding, “In reality, wellness for Black men is to just be surviving, living at the bare minimum. Literally, breathing, and having breath in our bodies.” Participant 9 also references breathing in a literal sense but in relation to awareness. Participant 9 reported, “Wellness is taking time to breathe and better understand what you need. You breathe to reset and get insight on what’s going on with you. You have to relax before you can act.” Tying to the sense of awareness, Participant 8 stated that wellness is “Awareness of how you feel, what you need,

and how to obtain it. You got to be more alert because mental health if you have too many things going on, it's one of the easiest things you can ignore. You have to first be aware of yourself." Participant 11 added, "The hardest part about wellness and being a Black man is just the first step: opening up. Once you take time to recognize what you need, you can learn to open up and act."

Becoming. After becoming aware of what wellness was to them, eight participants discussed the next step in reaching balance as actively pursuing your wellness needs. Participant 3 referred to this as "becoming more well." In discussing the pursuit of wellness needs, Participant 5 reported this step as, "You being able to take on that adversity and find what resources are able to help you combat what's against you, and just stand strong within a sense of consistency and just a strong mindset to keep that balance within your life." Participant 1 said "becoming your ideal well self" meant, "being able to make mistakes and keep striving. As a Black man, becoming strong and resilient for what you need." Participant 7 stated, "Don't ever lose perspective. Don't ever lose the drive. You have to maintain a sense of direction to get where you want to be to become your best self." In relation to attending college as a Black man, Participant 12 stated,

Black men must take priority and ownership of their wellness in college. PWIs or HBCUs. Cause I feel just in general, we [are] beginning to know more about it. We can talk about it every day. But then there's never a follow-up on how to actually do it. Act on it. Where to go. How to start. Black men have to learn how to not just be aware of their mental health, but also take control and act on their wellbeing. That's how we make it.

Being. The final subcategory that participants discussed was the idea of being. Out of 12 Participants, six participants discussed the step after becoming aware of their wellness needs and acting on them as reaching a place of "acceptance and sustainability," as stated by Participant 1. Participant 1 also stated that he knows he's "figured it out" when "I'm satisfied

with the groove I'm in. Living without regret." Participant 8 believes that Black men can sustain balance when "Black men have control over their wellbeing. You know you're good when you can just exist. Just be." Participant 9 reported, "Wellness to me means that you are aware of what's going on with you, and you are able to act on it, push forward whenever you need to, and finally get to a good headspace that you can maintain." Participant 12 believed that they are finally in a state of being "when, no matter what, wellness comes first." Lastly, Participant 7 said, "Once you realize wellness is all a fluid harmony, you're good. Regardless of what gets thrown your way. You can basically snap back and not get thrown off your groove too bad."

Food for Thought: "Other" Data

"Other" data reflects responses within the study that are considered rare (represent 1 to 2 participants) yet hold significance based on the aim of the study. Other data is not required to be represented in the final table with other domains but will still be addressed with the findings. Considerations that represent other key data from the sample are: (a) Black men heal, (b) intersectionality, and (c) grinding to thriving.

Black Men Heal

Over the course of the data collection process, two participants talked about the impact of receiving mental health and wellness services from Black male therapists. Participant 12 references resources such as counseling centers but discusses the lack of Black male-identified counselors. When discussing wellness support on a PWI college campus and the institution's roles in students' wellness, Participant 12 said,

Yeah, I think because it's easy to provide resources like go to the counseling center, but no one's going to say these things there. Nobody there that looks like us. Unless either they see it, are living it, or can communicate it. Black male therapists could be helpful, but they're not here.

Participant 10 talked about Black men accessing culturally-aware support resources and learning “how they can use different resources that may speak to different aspects of them, and to make sure that those resources align with Black men. It’d be even better if those (counseling) resources were Black men, too.”

Intersectionality

“We can’t forget about Black Intersectionality,” said Participant 2. Two participants in the sample discussed the need to consider the complexities of intersectionality when promoting wellness for Black men. Participant 11 mentioned that Black men are constantly juggling “multiple realities” and went on to say:

BMI can do more to discuss how diverse backgrounds play into different experiences within BMI and college. Just Black men with other intersecting identities. So people kind of struggle with identities sometimes. And that’s a early stage where you’re 18 and a lot of kids, it’s their first time away from home. Well, most people, it’s the first time away from home. And so I think they kind of struggle to navigate that understanding on top of everything else that’s going on. So I think background does play a role with not just academics, but your wellbeing and mental health as well. Like access to certain things, like just being handicapped versus not having this or that. Or identifying as LGBTQ+, and finding support around learning ability, to name a couple. All while at the same time being a man, and a Black man at that. Intersection of identity plays a role in Black men, for sure. Regardless of where you are.

From Grinding, to Thriving

When discussing mental health, wellness, and the Black community as a whole, in addition to explaining what wellness meant to him, 1 participant also discussed what he believed wellness was not. Participant 4 talked about a culture shift around wellbeing that needs to happen for Black men and Black people overall. He mentioned,

Wellness is not grinding. Black people perpetuate the ideology of surviving in the world, not thriving. Even by also saying things like ‘take care’ and ‘stay safe’ when we leave each other. It’s a constant reminder of a reality that we swear we want to change. There will always be a ceiling on our wellness potential if we don’t shift our cultural view of what it means to be well and practice being well.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study's sample, a reintroduction to the study research questions, and the overall findings discovered through the consensual qualitative research process and analysis. In the next chapter, these findings will be further discussed. Additionally, implications for counselors, student affairs professionals, and Counselor Education will be discussed.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

It's not about what you walk away from. It's about what you walk away with.

—Lil Wayne feat. Drake, *Believe Me*

The purpose of this study was to better understand the wellness of Black college men at predominantly white institutions. More specifically, this study had three goals. Those three goals were for the primary researcher to better understand: (a) the influence of PWI's sociocultural context on Black men's wellness, (b) how participation in student support-based programs, specifically Black Male Initiative programs, influenced the mental health and wellness of Black college men while attending PWIs, and (c) the meaning of wellness from the voices of Black college men.

It was important to conceptualize the collection of Hettler's (1980, 1984) six-dimensional wellness model, Myers et al.'s (2000) Wheel of Wellness, and Myers and Sweeney's (2005b) Indivisible Self when exploring wellness in this study because each model offered valuable considerations when evaluating the holistic wellness of college students. However, through utilizing the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method, it was more important to respect and honor the participants of this study as the experts of their lives and how they identified and defined wellbeing. That said, while previous wellness-based literature provided a foundational understanding of wellness for the researcher, this study contributed to previous wellness literature by allowing Black men to define what it truly means to be well to them through the lenses of their personal values, beliefs, and unique perspectives as they developed through a specific context.

My objective was to learn more about the lived experiences of Black college men at a predominantly white institution, factors that affect their wellness and understanding of

wellness, and ultimately seek a consensual understanding of how participating in this student support program impacts or influences their wellness throughout their college matriculation and beyond. This research study on Black men's mental health and wellbeing aimed to approach their lived-experiences through a strengths-based lens, highlighting a resource afforded to a specific sample of Black men during their time in undergrad, that has been supported by research as having a positive impact on their lived-experiences in college and graduation outcomes (Brooms, 2018a; Saleebey, 1996).

To complete this exploratory research, 12 participants were at least 18 years of age, identified as Black men, attended Southeastern College or graduated within the past 3 years, and participated in Black Male Initiative program at that institution. To conclude a journey of participant recruitment, qualitative interviewing, and consensual qualitative analysis led by the primary researcher with the assistance of a diverse group of researchers, a discussion of insightful considerations for counseling and educational scholarship and practice has emerged.

Findings

This section will discuss the results of the study as they align with the research questions. This dissertation study was guided by three research questions. More specifically, these research questions explored Black men's wellness as it related to the sociocultural environment of the PWI, involvement in the Black Male Initiative program at a predominantly White institution, and their perceptions of the meaning of wellness. The three research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do Black college men at PWIs define wellness?
2. How does the sociocultural context of a PWI influence Black men's wellness?

3. In what ways does participation in Black Male Initiative programs influence Black men's wellness?

Research Question 1

The first research question of this study was: How do Black college men at PWIs define wellness? This question aimed to gain insight about the meaning of the term “wellness” from the perspectives of Black college men. Due to the subjective nature of mental health and wellness terminology, participants were encouraged to reflect broadly and authentically. Additionally, participants were allowed to describe their definitions or meanings of wellness as it related to their lives holistically, or specifically during their time in college at their predominantly White undergraduate institution. The domain that best aligned with research question 1 was titled “Meaning of Wellness” to help with organizing data. Findings from research question 1, and its corresponding domain, produced one main theme and three subthemes. The theme, also referred to as a category in CQR research, for research question one is balance. The main theme of balance is best understood through the collection of three subthemes: breathing, becoming, and being.

Balance

“Balance is a natural state that results from the normal processes of stimuli and response, drive and drive satisfaction, and complex system interactions” (Hodge et al., 2009, p. 215). For the Black men who participated in the study, wellness to them meant balance; balance meaning a harmony across all of the areas of their lives that were important and valuable to them as Black men, specifically. While all 12 participants in the study referenced balance as a life-long action and goal, they all also mentioned the perspective that balance for Black men also means compromise across competing priorities, values, and in some cases,

identities. Similar to statements regarding belonging and wellness in Chapter 2, in balancing intersecting identities, for Black men, their salient identities may take preference over others at given points in time and across contexts. This in turn has an impact on their overall wellbeing.

In discussing research question 1, and based on a consensual analysis of the study sample, it is discovered that in order to understand wellness as it relates to balance in Black men, it is vital to consider intersectionality in their experiences. Because wellness is multifaceted, some of Black men's intersecting identities may constantly be in a state of deficit due to their context or circumstance. There is an acknowledgement that for Black men, wellness for the whole self, which integrates all identities at once, may never be fulfilled. This idea in mind, there is a possibility that Black men, as well as others with multiple intersecting marginalized identities, could potentially live under the idea that total wellness, or wellness spanning all aspects of an individual's identities and values, may be impossible to obtain.

Therefore, while considering the relationship between wellness, balance, and intersectionality, the 12 participants of the sample discussed balance as it related to their journeys of discovering what it means to be well for their whole selves, while understanding that the goal may never be reached. With that being said, balance for this sample meant an active relationship between breathing, becoming, and being.

Breathing. Breathing was discussed by participants in a literal sense, and related to the assumption that wellness should be as simple as breathing. Additionally, breathing was also conceptualized by participants for its relationship with life and literal awareness of breath in their bodies. In discussing breathing and awareness, 2 participants also linked these

ideas to the murder of George Floyd, connecting the statement “I Can’t Breathe” to breathing as a constant reminder of their identities as Black men, and the importance in being aware of what wellness means for those intersecting identities. This idea challenges how foundational models of wellness by acknowledging that for some individuals, like Black men, attending to their wellness means acknowledging varying forces that are actively working against it. To the sample, breathing represented the importance of Black men being aware of themselves, their identities, what resources those identities needed to be well, and what factors challenged the wellness of specific identities that they held. After breathing, or becoming aware, Black men can then pursue what they need to become well. This represents the next subtheme of becoming.

Becoming. Becoming was discussed by participants from the perspective of wellness, and the ideal self, for Black men being a constant pursuit. Many participants in the sample voiced the importance of themselves as Black men becoming stronger across areas of wellbeing that were important to them; discussing becoming as they were constantly chasing the best version of themselves. Eight participants in particular discussed the idea of constant growth as Black men in their relationship with their own mental health and wellbeing, and highlighted the vitality of action after awareness. One participant mentioned that while they are aware of wellness-related resources available for college students, and Black college students in particular, there is little discussion of how to actively pursue these resources. Recognizing that, becoming is arguably the most critical step in Black men’s pursuit of wellness, as it connects to self-actualization and help-seeking in college and across the lifespan (Goodwill et al., 2022). After successfully pursuing and discovering what they need, participants believed that Black men would enter into the final subtheme of balance: being.

Being. “Just honestly living” is how one participant discussed the final subtheme of balance. Participants discussed that after increased awareness of what their wellness needs are and successfully finding them, they have entered into a phase where they can “be” themselves, even with acknowledgment of imperfection and continued growth. However, as described by the sample, the subtheme of being also represents sustainability in how they balance their wellness journey. Participants viewed the idea of being to Black men as “not living on defense” and a phase of balance where they have learned how truly to be themselves. However, participants acknowledged the cyclical nature of wellness in college and mentioned that the stage of being could be viewed as both a moment-to-moment goal and a lifelong goal. Overall, for the sample of Black men, reaching a state of being meant that they had discovered what their wellness need was, actively pursued it, and reached a place of peace and satisfaction. For this sample of 12 participants, Black college men define wellness as a lifelong balancing act between self-awareness, self-actualization, and self-sustainability (sustainable peace), fueled by their intersecting identities and values in life. Additionally, the sample also acknowledged that in defining wellness for Black men, their lifelong balancing act of wellness is relative to their context.

Research Question 2

The second research question of this study was: How does the sociocultural context of a PWI influence Black men’s wellness? This question aimed to better understand Black college men’s perspectives on how the PWI context influenced their health and wellbeing. Through organizing participant responses, the study domain that best aligned with Research Question 2 was “PWI Experiences.” As it relates to Black men’s wellness, when asked about their time at their undergraduate institution, participants discussed 4 main themes. Those

themes were: (a) pre-college experiences, (b) transition, (c) the masks we wear, and (d) homeward bound. Subthemes, also referred to as subcategories, for this domain that are most relevant to the study will be discussed.

Pre-College Experiences

When considering their wellness experiences while attending a PWI, participants discussed the influence of experiences that took place prior to attending college, and how these experiences may have impacted their understanding of mental health before stepping foot on a college campus. The two areas of pre-college experiences that participants discussed related to mental health literacy and lessons learned from elders. When discussing mental health literacy, some participants discussed the lack of education on mental health literacy that they received in the K12 schooling. Few also mentioned the cultural stigma around mental health in the Black community. Many participants in the sample discussed that although there may have been limited conversations around mental health and wellness in their schools and communities, there were frequent conversations about racial dynamics given their identities as Black men. Given race-based oppression as a reality, for many participants, conversations on surviving their current environment took priority over conversations of wellness. Again, revealing stark differences from early wellness models in highlighting the power that a given context can have on an individual's wellbeing.

Much of this early conditioning participants discussed appeared to emphasize the significant attention to the racial and gender identities of Black men from an early age, and the wellness implications of these early teachings all related back to safety and perceptions of self based on their given context. This early attention to racial dynamics before entering a PWI environment in a way forces more attention on surviving the environment as an

unwelcome visitor, rather than thriving within it, as a contributing member of the community. Hence, societal and cultural factors are influencing Black men's views of their wellbeing prior to entering college. Through analyzing participants' responses, it appears that these lessons earlier in life begin to surface more as they transition into the PWI environment. Previous wellness models do not consider the role of oppression in a context, and further emphasizing the influence that a context can have on individual wellness. While many participants discussed feeling unwelcome into that space, and not understanding what wellness meant early on, wellness models should possibly consider a lifespan of learning about wellness, to better educate individuals about wellbeing as it relates to the spaces they navigate.

Transition

After discussing participants' pre-college understanding of wellness, all members of the sample discussed the effect that transitioning into the PWI environment had on their early wellbeing as new students in a new space. In discussing their transition into college, all participants discussed subthemes of feeling unwelcome and isolated in the PWI environment. One participant specifically discussed in detail his experience of feeling "othered" as a Black man during his early college experiences. Many discussed having transition difficulties aligned with culture shock due their marginalized identities in a majority-dominated space, even if they had previous experiences of attending predominantly White secondary schools. This led to another subtheme of forced autonomy, with participants potentially losing much of their early carefree mindset toward school by feeling the need to take control of their college experience early on and become more autonomous to be successful as Black men at a

PWI. The subthemes of feeling unwelcome, isolated, and forced autonomy directly contributed to the last subtheme of College Wellness 101.

College Wellness 101: Into the Unknown. The subtheme of College Wellness 101: Into the Unknown highlights the responses of 3 participants regarding their experiences of learning wellness through their struggles. Participants highlighted having to learn what wellness meant for them as an individual early in their academic journey, and that their experiences could've been smoother with more awareness of support and what they needed to be successful in the environment. The sample of Black men in this study consistently discussed the idea of self-authorship and their responsibility of taking control of their college experience early in order to be successful at a PWI.

Through feeling isolated and unwelcome, this sample of Black men had to become more autonomous over their wellbeing as college students early on. While transitioning into the college environment has been historically seen as a challenge for all college students, Black students have become known to have a unique set of wellness-related challenges to overcome as they learn to navigate the PWI context (Strayhorn et al., 2015). One particular strategy to navigate the PWI context that the sample goes on to discuss when discussing Black men's wellness is "wearing masks."

The Masks We Wear

The Black men in the sample all discussed how they felt the need to "wear masks," or disguise aspects of themselves in order to get what they needed to be "well" in the PWI environment. All participants aligned with the subtheme of feeling under pressure, and feelings of being under constant judgment and scrutiny as Black men at a PWI. Relating back to pre-college experiences, some participants felt as though society portrays Black men as

threatening as compared to other racial demographics and were instructed by their parents of the difficulties that they would experience in predominantly White spaces. These teachings in mind, participants discussed code-switching, the second subtheme, as a survival-based coping strategy.

Code-Switching. To be “well,” participants discussed code-switching as a safety mechanism that they could utilize to avoid attention or safely navigate spaces or people on campus. While some participants mentioned that code-switching was a skill that they were subconsciously taught as young Black boys to safely navigate specific environments, they all mentioned the threats to wellbeing that they experience from suppressing specific aspects of themselves. Of the sample, all participants discussed the harm that “wearing masks” has on their overall wellbeing when navigating a PWI, and stressed the importance of Black men, and Black students as a whole, finding places and faces where they could be their true and authentic selves, receive support, and be empowered to take care of themselves. Their whole self.

Homeward Bound

As the participants within the sample all discussed the various coping and survival strategies that they did as Black men to navigate the PWI environment, they each discussed the value in finding spaces where they felt safe, accepted, and free to be themselves as Black men. The Homeward Bound theme represents the shift of Black men at PWIs moving from a state of surviving at a predominantly White institution to thriving in the environment, by way of finding spaces and faces that enhance their sense of community and belonging. All 12 participants emphasized the importance of community and belonging, the first subtheme of this section, as key contributors to their success as Black men attending a PWIs. While

community was mostly used to reference peer relationships, which will be further discussed later, 3 participants specifically mentioned the integral part that Black faculty and staff played in their early college experiences.

A Ram in the Bush. “You know, right when you feel like you’re slipping through the cracks, here comes a Black staff member, lifting you up, giving what you need to keep going. Like a ram in the bush,” said Participant 2. In discussing their challenges and obstacles faced as Black men at a PWI, participants often ended with gratitude and recognition of Black faculty and staff that provided support to them throughout their experience. Particularly, participants highlighted the importance of Black students getting connected to Black-identified support professionals early in their college experiences, with hopes that professionals that shared similar identities to them would be able to help them establish support networks during their time in college. Participants acknowledged that for some of them, they would not have graduated from Southeastern College without the guidance and support of Black-identified faculty and staff members whom they connected with during their transition into the institution. Based on the sample, establishing community and connections helped challenge threats to their wellness while attending a PWI, through connecting them to support professionals and structures that would enhance their wellbeing and belonging during their matriculation.

Research Question 3

The final research question of this study was: In what ways does participation in Black Male Initiative programs influence Black men’s wellness at PWIs?? This question aimed to better understand Black college men’s perspectives of how engaging in BMI at their PWI influenced their wellbeing during their time in college, as well as their overall

understanding of wellness. Four themes emerged from participants' responses under the domain of "BMI's Wellness Influence." Those themes are: (a) access, (b) counterspace, (c) building bridges, and (d) to infinity and beyond.

Access

While the subthemes of peer and staff support also align with the Homeward Bound theme noted in research question 2, they are elaborated here regarding the ways participants believed BMI positively enhanced their wellness during their time in undergrad. Aside from gaining interpersonal access to supportive peers, participants more specifically highlighted how being a member of the Black Male Initiative program gave them institutional access to Black male roommates as early as freshman year. Participants believed that having other Black men to live with who could relate to their experience of attending a PWI was critical to their mental health and wellness during their time in college. Several participants went on to acknowledge the power that the roommate-pairings had on their overall development as Black men, and learned how to support other Black men navigating similar challenges or experiences.

Like the Homeward Bound theme, participants also believed that BMI positively influenced their wellness through providing them access to supportive Black male-identified staff who worked directly with the initiative, another subtheme of this category. Participants believed that BMI staff served as a catalyst to both their college experiences and health and wellbeing during their time in school and beyond. However, some participants had varied experiences when discussing support from staff.

Leadership and Staff Support: A Double-Edged Sword. Another subtheme that arose from the data reflected the two-sided nature of participants' perspectives of support

from staff. While many participants believed that BMI staff positively influenced their mental health and wellness during their time at Southeastern College, some participants felt differently. Participants reflected mental health and wellness are subjective concepts fueled by individual perspectives.

Although mental health and wellness may be discussed in BMI, some participants did not feel that all staff's perspectives of wellness were as inclusive of various identities and values of all the Black men represented in the initiative. Some participants believed that wellness-based programming led by staff was geared toward racial identity, social identity, and career wellness, rather than the intersection of multiple identities and values of Black men. While no participants discussed their wellness being harmed by BMI staff, the data does support the study's argument in a need to better understand what wellness means to Black college men, to provide more holistic and inclusive wellness-related support.

Counterspace

When discussing other ways that BMI influences Black men's wellness, all members of the sample talked about how BMI at Southeastern College served as a counterspace within the larger PWI context for them during their time in undergrad. Additionally, participants referenced the importance of identity-based spaces and how they can positively affect the mental health of marginalized students at predominantly White institutions. Several participants frequently referred to BMI as a "home-away-from-home," attesting much of the positive effect on student wellbeing stemming from the institutional-access to the learning community-structure of the initiative within the larger environment of a PWI.

BMI is the People, and BMI is the Location. Another subtheme that emerged with the counterspace theme was participants' belief that the Black Male Initiative was identified

just as much with the physical location of where participants lived, and programming took place just as much as it was with the people. All the participants in the sample acknowledge that not only Black men, but all students, knew the initiative primarily because of its location and that its location was seen as a safe space for all students. Participants believed that being able to live where BMI events and programs also took place significantly increased their wellbeing throughout college.

Building Bridges

Tying back to the constant themes of community and support, participants also discussed how their participation in BMI influenced their wellbeing through promoting the idea of brotherhood and the importance of Black men's shared accountability for each other's collegiate experiences, particularly their health and safety. All participants spoke on the shared accountability for other BMI members during their college experiences, and how understanding their own individual wellness needs simply wasn't enough. Participants discussed that as Black men, it was important to be "bridge builders," like other Black male students, staff, faculty, and elders were for them in their lives. Participants emphasized the stigma around general help-seeking in the Black men, especially as it relates to mental health, and believed it was their duty to pass on any insight and lessons learned if it meant creating an easier journey through life for another Black man. Participants directly discussed the influence of peer mentorship and how taking their wellness knowledge, and paying it forward to other BMI members essentially promoted positive mental health outcomes in their lives. Participants believed that once they learned how to love and take care of themselves, it was vital that they not only loved and took care of other Black men, but more importantly taught other Black men how to love and take care of themselves.

“...And Beyond”

To Infinity and Beyond represents the sample’s view of how the wellness-specific lessons learned through their BMI involvement will continue to influence their wellbeing after graduating from college. While the first three themes within the domain of BMI’s Wellness Influence primarily reflect participants’ experiences while currently enrolled at Southeastern College, several participants believed that BMI has impacted their lives post-graduation. Participants believed that involvement in BMI encouraged self-exploration both during and after college enrollment, specifically as it relates to wellbeing. Participants that were still current students believed that BMI provided them with resources that they could use to begin exploring what wellness meant to them during their time in college and carry with them as they graduate.

Wellness Post-Grad. Participants who had recently graduated from Southeastern College believed that BMI helped them learn healthy coping strategies for future obstacles and challenging times. Additionally, participants believed that BMI taught them the importance of self-advocacy and self-authorship, as it relates to Black men’s wellbeing. One idea that was mentioned by the sample was BMI promoting the necessity of community and belonging for Black men, regardless of their environment or circumstance.

Most notably, alum participants believed that their biggest takeaway about BMI’s wellness influence on their lives was BMI’s continued advocacy of the importance of self-exploration and self-authorship in the lives of Black men. Participants believed that BMI helped them understand that there is not a single way to be a Black man, and that discovering what “being a Black man” meant to them, and living that their vision for themselves out, would someday lead to optimal wellbeing and happiness in their lives.

Implications

The current study provides an understanding of Black men's wellness as it relates to their experiences in a Black Male Initiative program at a predominantly White institution of higher education. Findings from this study suggest that Black Male Initiative programs at predominantly White institutions of higher education can influence the mental health and wellness of Black men during their college enrollment and post-graduation. Findings also suggest that Black college men's meaning, definition, or understanding of wellness as a concept is not only inclusive of their unique lived experiences as Black men but also considerate of the integration of other intersecting identities they may hold. Due to these findings, implications for theory and practice in higher education and counselor education are suggested.

Implications for Theory

The theoretical implications of this study derive from the findings that surfaced from participants' responses to the research questions as they relate to Black college men's mental health and wellness. Additionally, theoretical implications also emerged from the utilization of a conceptual wellness framework as a foundational understanding of college student wellbeing. The primary theoretical implications that are most relevant to this study are: (a) intersectionality and wellness theory and (b) benefits of wellness accountability of others.

Wellness and Intersectionality

Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) was a beneficial research method for this study due to its goal of amplifying a multitude of diverse voices and experiences. In this study, CQR underscored the sample's descriptions of wellness based on their identity as Black college men. To gain a broader understanding of wellness through the lens of 12 Black

college men, participants highlighted other identities that they held, with some being more salient than their racial and gender identities. Participant's voices revealed that wellness concepts, theories, and frameworks must be inclusive and considerate of the complexities of identity, and how an individual's definition of wellness may vary based on how their intersecting realities engage with specific contexts (Allen et al., 2014; Crenshaw, 2017).

Black Male Initiative programs, as discussed throughout the study, have become positively known for their support of Black male college students; however, this study shows that even while engaged in BMI programs, some Black men may not be receiving all the support they need, specific to how they identify as a whole person. This idea suggests opportunities for wellness scholars to broaden our understanding of wellness and mental health as they relate to the intersection of multiple identities. Foundational models of wellness do not consider how individuals should approach wellness when there are forces, such as environmental or societal, working against them. This implies a need for wellness models to incorporate specific attention to the influence of oppression and inequity within specific contexts as they relate to marginalization and societal injustice.

Wellness and Caring for Others

In discussing participants' takeaways about wellness from their PWI experiences and participation in BMI, all 12 participants discussed the positive wellness effects that they received from supporting other Black college men within the initiative. While many participants voiced the need to care for other members in BMI as their responsibilities, the entire sample mentioned feeling a sense of ease, relief, positive effects on their mental health from providing support to other Black men. This implies that wellness theories and frameworks should also consider the wellness benefits of a person's actions toward

supporting others. More specifically, the wellness implications of relationships and caring across and within individual's cultural backgrounds (race, gender, motherhood, etc.). Other literature in counseling and education research that have mentioned mental-health related outcomes linked to Black men's relational influence include mentoring (Butler et al., 2013) and otherfathering (Hannon, 2022). In addition to the relational influence of individual wellness, this study suggests positive wellness outcomes can be achieved through group membership and involvement.

Wellness and Belonging

All the participants in the study discussed the influence that sense of belonging had on their wellbeing while in college. More importantly, participants also discussed their takeaways about the importance of belonging from their college experiences and how they've worked to apply that understanding to their lives as college graduates. Strayhorn (2018) and Strayhorn et al. (2015) highlight how need for belonging varies across settings based on an individual's background, and that populations who are historically marginalized not only need enhanced attention to belonging to promote their success in a context, but also their wellbeing. Although participants heavily discussed belonging's influence on their wellness at a PWI, none of the previous wellness models have discussed sense of belonging. This study suggests further evaluation of sense of belonging's influence on wellness, particularly marginalized populations navigating majority-dominated environments.

Implications for Practice

Gaining a better understanding of the lived experiences of a sample of Black college men attending a predominantly White institution provided a host of implications for practice. This study provides implications that may inform the practice of student affairs and

counselor education. I hoped to provide greater clarity on how Black college men define wellness, and what the participants described is while attending predominantly White institutions, they feel unwelcome upon transitioning into the institution, followed by increased feelings of isolation and pressure to advocate for their learning, wellbeing, and overall collegiate success. Due to the insight that participants described, student affairs staff and administrators at PWIs should develop college transition practices for Black college students, particularly Black men, which are more considerate of the obstacles they may face upon arriving into an environment where they are viewed as the minority.

Additionally, it is critical that student affairs professionals are mindful of the health and wellness implications during the transition phase of college students from marginalized backgrounds. The role of the Black Male Initiatives, or similar programs, especially at PWI's, are to provide Black male-identified students with an enhanced sense of belonging and support during their college matriculation. Although this study focused on the experiences of students that engaged in BMI during their undergraduate education, there is also the reality that programs like BMI may not be accessible to all Black male students at an institution. Additionally, all Black male students may not necessarily be interested in engaging in a BMI; therefore student affairs professionals at PWIs must continue to evaluate both the reach of minority-based student support initiatives on their, as well as students' perspectives of their preferred methods of support.

BMI was also perceived as a resourceful counterspace for participants at their predominantly White institution. However, counterpaces have been viewed as spaces that were developed with oppression in mind, acknowledging the power dynamics influencing the experiences of marginalized populations in majority dominated spaces. This implies the need

for frameworks and supportive structures that are built for marginalized populations from a strengths-based lens. Strengths-based spaces and practices could provide professionals with the opportunity to do psychoeducation about relevant wellness strategies with Black men and teach skills that can bolster them in college and beyond.

Practitioners working at PWIs may also wish to reflect on the importance of that context and how it was described by the participants as causing them to feel isolated, stressed, and exhausted. With all participants highlighting the significance of having access to Black-identified staff and faculty for support, particularly Black men, PWIs need to continue to evaluate their hiring practices across institutions, uplifting not only the value of diverse representation in staffing but the wellness-related impact of diverse staffing on student support for marginalized populations enrolled at these types of colleges. While participants did acknowledge the support received from Black male professionals involved with BMI, the differences in BMI staff's perspectives of wellness and mental health as constructs had varying levels of impact on participants' experiences, with some participants experiencing a positive influence on their wellbeing, while others did not. This supports a greater need for Black male counselors and wellness professionals across higher education, especially PWIs.

Increasing the amount of Black male counselors and health and wellness professionals will not only increase access to diverse clinical support in units like college counseling centers, wellness spaces, and student health centers, but it will also enhance opportunities for collaboration between these wellness-related support units, BMIs, and BMI-like programs. Therefore, practitioners working in counseling centers and other wellness spaces could offer consultation, programming, and insight that is considerate of Black men's

lived experiences through the voices of Black male clinicians. College counselors and wellness professionals at PWIs, and historically Black colleges and universities, can help BMI leaders to co-construct wellness-related activities centering the experiences of Black college men in their programs.

Opportunities of working in spaces such as residence halls, advising offices, and career centers could also be increased to better evaluate the relationship between Black men's wellness and other aspects of their college journey while attending a PWI.

These are ideas and implications that can be better explored through Counselor Education programs, particularly in counselor-training. Although Counselor Education programs provide students with clinical knowledge and skills to prepare them for work as counselors across school and community settings, this study supports the need for more counseling professionals in student affairs settings. The clinical awareness and knowledge of counselors and counselor educators of wellness and mental health concepts could support programs, like a BMI, through providing wellness-related workshops and training to not only educate students, staff, and faculty involved, but more importantly advocate for increased discussions of mental health and access to services. These collaborations may promote proactive partnerships and outreach programming across a diverse range of units within the student affairs context.

Participants mentioned that it was easier to raise awareness of Black men's wellness than how to find support for it. Through collaborating with counselors and counselor education programs, that gap of Black men knowing how to find help can be closed. Lastly, in considering the value of participants' lenses as Black men, speaking to their beliefs of Black men's health and wellbeing, and their frustrations with inaccessible Black male-

identified clinical support, Counselor Education programs must continue to promote the need for representative care to support marginalized communities of people, specifically Black men. Counselor educators must continue to teach trainees about wellness considerations as they relate to race in society, and develop more curriculum and continuing education that better equips counselors, counselor educators, and counselor trainees to approach matters of multiculturalism as it relates to work with specific populations of clients, such as Black and African-American men, across their lifespan.

Limitations

There are several limitations within this study that should be considered. First, the intentional homogeneity of the study's sample may be viewed as a limitation. All participants shared their experiences of engaging in a single Black Male Initiative program located at the same predominantly White institution. The selected sampling approach for the study may have limited the opportunity for the inclusion of diverse perspectives of other Black men involved in BMI programs across other PWIs. Additionally, while a sample of 12 participants in CQR research aligns with the recommended sample range, centering the voices of Black men across other BMI programs could have strengthened the study findings. The sample also consisted of both current students and alums. This could be seen as a limitation in that currently enrolled participants' perspectives of wellness may be more strongly influenced by their college student status as compared to their recently-graduated peers.

Another limitation of this study was the selected method of data collection and analysis. Consensual qualitative research relies on only one source of data collection: interviewing. Participants were asked to engage in one virtual semi-structured interview, with

each interview averaging less than 60 minutes. Virtual interviews increased accessibility within the data collection process but still offered a barrier to engaging with participants in-person, where the researcher may have had a better understanding of participants' responses through observing body language and physical reactions. Although interviews are the primary source of data collection in consensual qualitative research, this may be viewed as a limitation as other forms of data, such as focus groups and observations, could have potentially revealed more about participants' lived experiences at a PWI, and could have better captured their collective "truth." Incorporating additional artifacts, such as materials related to the institution's Black Male Initiative program, could have also enhanced the researcher's understanding of the initiative's relationship with both student members and its home institution.

Lastly, another potential limitation of the study may have been my identity as a Black man who has attended a PWI. These are identities that I share with all the participants of this study. However, CQR requires the incorporation of a diverse data analysis team, where consensus on the data is sought by team members through accounting for and bracketing researcher bias. Additionally, to further address this limitation, member-checking strategies during the data collection and analysis processes were utilized to ensure trustworthiness throughout the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides greater understanding of the wellness of Black college men through their engagement in a Black Male Initiative program at a predominantly White institution in the south. This study also illustrates the meaning of wellness to a sample of Black college men. While this study yields information pertaining to Black college men's

wellness through the voices of a sample of 12 participants, opportunities for future research in the area of Black men's health arise. As participants primarily spoke about their wellness and lived experiences at PWIs through the lens of their identities as Black men in college, future research should continue to investigate how Black college men define wellness and mental health regardless of college type.

The focus of a small sample of students within a specific support initiative at a PWI institution does not fully encompass the perspectives and collective truth of all Black men at PWIs nor across other college types. Future studies should explore what wellness means to Black men across institutional types and academic classifications, including historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), community colleges, and first-year students. Also, future research should seek to understand the wellness influence of BMIs at other institutions, including HBCUs. It may be helpful to replicate aspects of this study, adding an exploration of student experiences at other PWIs and also HBCUs, to compare findings across institutions. This could help researchers gain a broader understanding of the influence of BMI programs at different institutions. Additional studies seeking to better understand the wellness implications of group involvement or membership should also be considered.

This research study primarily focuses on Black men's undergraduate student experiences. Future research on Black men's health and wellness should also consider the experiences of graduate and professional students, as Black men at these levels face challenges specific to graduate education. Additionally, with participants discussing the lack of awareness of mental health literacy prior to entering the college environment, future studies may consider exploring student wellness at the K12 educational level, particularly mental and wellness with Black boys. With mental health literacy lacking in participants

upbringing, future research should also explore how students are introduced to mental health literacy and services when transitioning to college. With participants frequently mentioning the challenges of Black college students overall in the PWI context, future research on college student wellbeing may also seek to better understand the mental health and wellness experiences of Black women, transgender, and non-binary individuals, during college and post-graduation.

Lastly, the primary researcher of this study utilized a conceptual wellness framework as a foundation for understanding mental wellness in college students. This study relied on Black men as the experts of their wellness, as previous wellness frameworks were developed through the perspectives of White professionals, and a framework specific to the experiences of Black and African-American people does not exist. Suggestions for future research include further utilization and evaluation of wellness frameworks when engaging with Black and African-American people and other historically marginalized populations. Additionally, study participants frequently emphasized how context can influence wellbeing. In a sample that was comprised of participants at different stages of their lifespan, future research should continue to evaluate the developmental nature of wellness.

The Black men in the study discussed how their developmental experiences at a PWI took them through circumstances of surviving when they initially entered the college environment to thriving as they discovered resources specifically geared toward their success. Myers et al.'s (2000) point of view includes a vague reference to wellness being "a way of life" (p. 252) but does not at all take into consideration the "surviving" to "thriving" point of view that the participants in this study experienced. "Healthy functioning occurs on a developmental continuum" (Myers et al., 2000, p. 252); therefore, learning healthy behaviors

earlier in the lifespan can positively affect subsequent development and functioning later in life, or in this case, college. Also, no previous wellness models have incorporated a sense of belonging. For all participants in the study, belonging significantly contributed to their wellness outcomes throughout their college experiences and beyond. Strayhorn et al. (2015) support how belonging is an important contributor to wellness, particularly for populations who have neither always felt accepted nor represented in various social spaces. The potential development of wellness models that emphasizes the interplay of lifespan development, systemic oppression, belonging, and intersectionality on individuals across contexts should be considered.

Chapter Summary

This study aimed to construct a consensual understanding Black college men's wellness at a predominantly White institution through exploring their involvement in a Black Male Initiative program. The findings of this study reveal that involvement in a Black Male Initiative program at a predominantly White institution does have immediate and long-lasting influence on Black men's mental health and wellbeing during college and post-graduation. There is increased opportunity for counselors and counselor educators to assist student affairs units and practitioners in better supporting Black men's wellness during their time at PWIs.

Additionally, the findings of this study suggest opportunities for continued research on BMI's wellness influence across diverse institutional types, the wellness of Black boys and men across the lifespan, and enhanced multicultural considerations in mental health and wellness assessments and frameworks. Lastly, the exploration of wellness across other historically marginalized populations is recommended for future research studies.

Participants involved in this study voiced their subjective truth regarding Black men's wellness, revealing that there may be more to it than meets the eye.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Gatekeeper Permission Email

Hey, what's up, CJ and Jameco!

I hope all is well your way—long time, no see! I wanted to reach out to you to ask for permission to conduct my dissertation study with the guys in your BMI program. I am targeting current students and graduates (anyone that has been at State and in BMI within the past 3 years) to better understand how involvement in BMI has impacted their wellness while attending a PWI. I plan on conducting semi-structured interviews with about 8 to 15 Black college men to learn about their experiences.

For this project, the only thing I would need access to is a list of current and past BMI members (contact emails work perfectly). The only aspect of this study where student identifiers will be accessible is in the informed consent form. After that, participants will remain anonymous throughout the duration of the interviews and within my final write-up. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms before starting the interview process. If this is not allowed, that is totally fine. I can forward my recruitment materials to you all to be distributed to your membership.

I really appreciate all the work that you all do, and I hope that my study can continue to raise awareness of your work and highlight the influence that programs like BMI and similar initiatives have on student mental health and wellness.

Hope to hear from you soon!

Felix

Felix Morton IV, LCMHC, CCTP, CHWC (*he/him/his*)

Doctoral Candidate, Counseling and Counselor Education
2020-2021 Chi Sigma Iota International Leadership Fellow
2019-2021 CSI Past-President, Nu Sigma Chi Chapter

Email: fmorton@ncsu.edu

LinkedIn: [Felix Morton IV](#)

NC STATE

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

THIS IS A RESEARCH STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore how involvement in BMI impacts the wellness of Black college men.

WELLNESS & BLACK MALE INITIATIVES

Participants must:

- ✓ Be at least 18 years of age
- ✓ Identify as a Black man
- ✓ Have attended [Southeastern College] within last 3 years
- ✓ Have participated in a Black Male Initiative program

Participate in this study and receive a \$25 gift card

For More Information:

contact
Felix Morton IV
 fmortonencsu.edu

Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Letter

Hello,

My name is Felix Morton IV, and I am a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University. I am writing to request your participation in my dissertation research project. The purpose of this research project is to better understand factors that impact the wellness of Black college men at predominantly white institutions. **More specifically, this project seeks to explore how involvement in Black Male Initiative programs influences the wellness of Black college men at PWIs.** To be a participant in this research study, you must be 18 years of age, identify as a Black/African American man, attend or have attended [Southeastern College] within the past 3 years, and have participated in the Black Male Initiative program at [Southeastern College].

In this study, you will be asked to complete an electronic demographic survey that assesses your previous and current experience in college. The total estimated time of the entire investigation is about an hour and a half, with up to thirty minutes allotted for you to complete the demographic form and up to one hour to complete the interview with me.

The interview will be scheduled using the web-conferencing software, Zoom. I will request your consent for the interview to be audio-recorded. I will limit access to the survey and audio recording by keeping them stored in a password-protected folder on my laptop following its upload to my NCSU Zoom account. After the interview is completed, and within two weeks, I will contact you and provide you with a written transcript of your responses for your review and approval. I will then destroy the digital audio and video files of the interview from my NCSU Zoom account. Informed consent documentation will be stored in a password-protected Google Drive folder on my laptop.

Please note that your participation in this research project is voluntary. The North Carolina State University's Institutional Review Board has approved this study. An IRB office ensures that studies with human participants follow federal rules and helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. Should you have any concerns about your rights and how you are being treated, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) office. You can contact the NC State University IRB office at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out a confidential form online at <https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/>.

Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Adria Dunbar who may be contacted at adria.dunbar@ncsu.edu. If you have questions, want more information, or would like to be a part of this investigation, please contact me, Felix Morton IV, at fmorton@ncsu.edu and/or by phone at (252) 813-5215.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Felix Morton IV, LCMHC, CCTP, NCC
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership, Policy, & Human Development
North Carolina State University

Appendix D: Participant Demographic Survey

Participant Demographic Survey for Qualtrics

Please respond to the following questions about your background.

Participant's Name:

A pseudonym, or fictitious name, will be used to ensure that your data is anonymous. In the case that one is taken, please indicate two potential pseudonyms you would like to use. If you do not select a pseudonym, one will be selected for you by the researcher.

Email Address (to be contacted for interview scheduling):

Racial Identity:

Ethnicity:

Gender Identity:

Age:

Hometown (i.e., city, state, country of origin):

Undergraduate College/University:

Major:

Undergraduate Classification:

Freshman
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
Other

Enrollment status:

Full-time
Part-time
Neither

If you are not a current student, what was your undergraduate graduation date?

Employment status: Employed, Unemployed, Disabled, Full-time/Part-time student

If you work, what is your profession?:

Please describe your family structure:

Married-couple or two-parent family
 Guardian(s) (i.e., grandparents, foster parents)
 Family with female head of household, no spouse present
 Family with a male head of household, no spouse present
 Other (please specify):

What is the highest level of educational attainment of your mother, female guardian, or female head of household?:

Professional degree (e.g., M.D., D.D.S., J.D., D.V.M.)
 Doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D.)
 Master's degree
 Bachelor's degree (4-year degree)
 Associate's degree (2-year degree)
 Some college
 High School diploma or GED
 No diploma or GED
 I do not know
 I do not have a mother, female guardian, or female head of household

What is the highest level of educational attainment of your father, male guardian, or male head of household?:

Professional degree (e.g., M.D., D.D.S., J.D., D.V.M.)
 Doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D.)
 Master's degree
 Bachelor's degree (4-year degree)
 Associate's degree (2-year degree)
 Some college
 High School diploma or GED
 No diploma or GED
 I do not know
 I do not have a father, male guardian, or male head of household

How would you describe your socioeconomic status growing up?

Low-class
 Working class
 Middle class
 Wealthy/Affluent

Have you been involved with BMI at your undergraduate institution within the past 3 years (participated in Black Male Initiative program activities between 2019 - 2022)?

If so, how many years have you been/ were you involved with the BMI program at your undergraduate institution?