ABSTRACT

DAVIS, BRADLEY RAMONE. A Qualitative Case Study on the Experiences of Men of Color Participating in the North Carolina Community College System's Minority Male Success Initiative. (Under the direction of Dr. James Bartlett II).

The Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI) serves as a system-wide grant opportunity from the North Carolina Community College system aimed at improving success outcomes for male students of color (North Carolina Community Colleges, n.d.). This study explored and examined the experiences of men of color who participated in MMSI programming and whether the participants perceive their involvement influenced their success. Semistructured interviews were completed with seven (7) men of color who are enrolled at a community college in North Carolina. Wood and Harris's (2016) S-E-O model was used as a theoretical framework model for the study. A MMSI program observation and review of MMSI documentation and reports provided additional data for the study. Findings from this qualitative case study indicated that men of color participating in MMSI programming experience authentic support from faculty and staff. Additionally, participants who are connected with the community college early in their academic journeys are likely to maintain involvement with MMSI sponsored programs. Participants also revealed how their personal lives and academic journeys have been shaped by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Findings also suggested that programming that provides tangible life skills and how to navigate the campus environment and society as a man of color also influenced their success. Senior community college leadership, faculty, and safety must prioritize understanding the experiences of men of color as well as implement program and support services to achieve higher completion and persistence rates for this population.

A Qualitative Case Study on the Experiences of Men of Color Participating in the North Carolina Community College System's Minority Male Success Initiative

by
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my sons, Harrison and Hughes. May this serve as evidence of persistence and dreams realized. As Black boys who will become Black men, you matter and your lives matter.

BIOGRAPHY

Bradley Davis was born on September 4, 1985 in Petersburg, VA to Bernard Jones and Vera Harwell. Bradley grew up in the small village known as Ettrick where he lived until enrolling at James Madison University. Bradley earned his Bachelor of Science degree in kinesiology as well as his Master of Education degree in college student personnel administration from James Madison University. In his free time, Bradley enjoys playing golf, attending live sporting events and concerts, and spending time with his family and friends.

Bradley's professional career began in 2009 at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNC Wilmington) where he served as a residence coordinator in a first-year residential community. Bradley served in this role until 2012 where he moved to an upperclassman, apartment style residential community. During his time at UNC Wilmington, Bradley served on various committees with the Division of Student Affairs, as well as taught a first-year seminar course for multiple semesters. Also, while in Wilmington, North Carolina, Bradley met his partner, Jemilia Davis. In 2014, Bradley shifted to the Office of Dean of Students serving as the assistant dean of students at UNC Wilmington until 2017.

Beginning in August 2017, Bradley worked as the Associate Director of Student Conduct at North Carolina State University (NC State) where he educated the university community about policies and procedures to promote safety, accountability, and student success. Bradley also supported university faculty through the conduct process to champion academic integrity. Bradley is a former staff senator with the NC State Staff Senate, serving during the 2020–2022 term.

With the encouragement of his wife and partner, Jemilia, Bradley applied for the EdD program at NC State. Bradley saw this as an incredible opportunity to further his education and

expand his network into the community college space. Bradley enrolled in the community college leadership EdD program starting the summer of 2020.

Bradley joined the Office of the Chancellor as the faculty/staff ombuds in August 2023. As the Faculty/Staff Ombuds, Bradley will serve as a confidential, independent, and impartial resource for university faculty and staff. In the Faculty/Staff Ombuds role, Bradley looks forward to building and strengthening relationships with NC State faculty, staff, and campus partners to empower others to reach their full potential.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This introduction chapter provides an overview of the Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI) currently facilitated by the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and the intended efforts to support men of color across the state. This chapter will describe the program's origins and its current iteration and implementation. Lastly, this chapter will summarize the purpose and significance of the study, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, a statement of the problem, and limitations and delimitations of the study.

The North Carolina Community College System is home to 58 community colleges in North Carolina serving all 100 counties in the state. Embedded in the fabric of the North Carolina Community College is the commitment to providing educational opportunities while eliminating barriers to success (North Carolina Community Colleges, n.d.). The North Carolina Community College System's strategic plan focuses on improving the lives of NCCCS students by equipping them with necessary skills and knowledge for postsecondary degree and credential attainment. Within the System's strategic plan is the focus on serving underrepresented students. Particularly, the strategic plan emphasizes that North Carolina Community Colleges should prioritize eliminating access barriers that would prevent underserved populations from entering their doors. Furthermore, North Carolina Community Colleges should provide intentional support and services that promote student success. When considering degree completion, North Carolina Community Colleges also have the responsibility of providing adequate advising and career opportunities that increase degree completion and successful transfers to the workforce or 4-year institutions.

The Minority Male Success Initiative is a grant-funded opportunity for North Carolina Community Colleges to address success gaps for historically underserved males in the North

Carolina Community College System. The Minority Male Success Initiative aims to increase success outcomes and completion rates for minority male students in the System. Through the 2019 grant cycle, institutions could utilize funds in three areas: (a) programmatic efforts, (b) success coaches, or (c) an early alert system. Outlined on the North Carolina Community College System website, institutions receiving funds achieve the purpose of the program through the following ways (North Carolina Community Colleges, n.d.).

- Provide integrated and targeted supports and interventions when they are most effective.
- Aid student's progress through programs that lead to valuable credentials, without unnecessary detours.
- Assist students in making informed decisions which results in understanding the requirements and processes to succeed.

History and Origin of MMSI

For decades, institutions of higher education have implemented target programming aimed at increasing success outcomes for men of color (citation). Historically, these types of campus wide initiatives have been aimed at Black males but over time, institutions have incorporated other racial and ethnic groups into their initiatives. Dating back to 1990, the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) was established at Georgia Southwestern University with the intended goal of increasing retention, persistence, and completion for men of color in higher education (Student African American Brotherhood, 2020). During a 2018 study on how Black males make meaning of their experiences participating in these program initiatives, Brooms (2018) reveals the wide variety of Black Male Initiatives being implemented across higher education institutions. Specifically, Broom (2018) identifies programs being facilitated across the United States such as SAAB, African American Initiative Program, Brother2Brother,

and the Black Male Think Tank as examples. Although the goals of the programs all center on improving success outcomes for men of color, Brooms (2018) indicates that these programs are primarily housed at Predominantly White Institutions. Beginning in the 2016–2017 academic year, the redesign of the Minority Male Mentoring Program, known as 3MP, birthed the MMSI. Historically, the 3MP was launched in 2003 using funds from the 2003 Governor's Crime Commission to achieve higher success outcomes including graduation and retention rates (North Carolina Community Colleges, 2013). When the 3MP began, six North Carolina Community colleges piloted the program aimed at supporting the matriculation of minority male students in the state. Around the start of the 2000s, a report from SuccessNC outlined how North Carolina Community College system administrators recognized the performance and persistence gaps between men of color and white males within the system (North Carolina Community Colleges, 2013). Initially, the program sought to assist first-generation students as well as those who may have experienced struggles with substance abuse. With a collaborative approach, voices around the proverbial table moved to provide mentoring and support services for enrolled men of color in order to close the gaps for completion and graduation rates. Through many iterations from year to year, North Carolina Community Colleges have supported men of color through the 3MP and MMSI programs by providing academic support services, counseling, tutoring, and experiences to build personal and professional networks.

The Minority Male Mentoring Program grew to 15 campuses in 2007. By 2013, nearly 46 campuses were receiving grant funding to support programs and initiatives for this population of students. Employees at North Carolina Community Colleges would have to complete a detailed yearly proposal in order to receive grant funding to support their respective programs. In 2013, institutions received approximately $20,000 each for the 3MP programs aimed at increasing

graduation and retention rates. Through the most recent grant cycle, community colleges receiving MMSI supported funding were allocated at least $75,000 over the 3 year grant period. Although North Carolina Community Colleges are not required to apply for funding to support men of color on their campus, funding through the MMSI initiative is available and provides colleges with an additional opportunity to support this population.

Problem Statement

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment for men of color at higher education institutions across the nation trended downward which only increased as the global pandemic permeated our society. Total community college enrollment declined approximately 11% when comparing the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 semester with the highest percentage of decline being workforce development and basic skills programs (Thomas & Taffe, 2021; Quattrocchi, 2022). Contrary to enrollment trends during previous recessions, the COVID-19 pandemic did not bring the anticipated enrollment increase anticipated by college administrators and state lawmakers (Granados, A, & Urquhart, M., 2020). MyFutureNC has a targeted goal of 2 million North Carolina citizens with a completed degree or credential by 2030 (MyFutureNC, 2023). Decreases in enrollment significantly threatens MyFutureNC's goal and the potential impacts of attaining high educational achievement. Looking beyond the state of North Carolina, nearly 400,000 fewer men enrolled in the U.S. colleges and universities including community colleges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Men of color, particularly, African-American and Black men, represent the largest decline in enrollment from 2021 compared to 2020. Although the proverbial finger could be pointed at the COVID-19 pandemic for decreases in enrollment, the fact remains that increasing higher education costs and the possibility of attaining jobs without attending college are also critical factors impacting community college enrollment. If higher education

institutions do not address their institutional programs and efforts that are intended to retain and support men of color students, wealth and equity gaps for men of color will continue to widen; thus, negatively impacting future success and career earnings.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the experiences of minority males participating in the MMSI at one North Carolina community college, Dream Community College (pseudonym). The research also explored how participants actively engaged in MMSI programmatic efforts perceive institutional programming efforts on their overall success (e.g., persistence, graduation, grades).

Theoretical Framework

Although the study of men of color in higher education has been more prevalent among those attending 4-year institutions, the study of the experiences of men of color at community colleges has been relatively sparse (Harris and Wood, 2016). Harris and Wood (2016) developed the social-ecological outcomes (SEO) framework model to enhance and cultivate research on men of color studying at community colleges. Harris and Wood (2016) developed the S-E-O model by identifying five domains connected to the success of Black men attending community colleges. From the intersection of academic, social, environmental, noncognitive, and institutional factors which influenced Black male experiences in higher education, Harris and Wood developed the five domains model which serves as the impetus of the S-E-O model. Specifically, Harris and Wood (2016) noted that the five domains were composed after extensive research on student success outcomes of Black men. The validity and reliability of the S-E-O model draws from Community College Survey of Men (CCSM) completed by 4,000 male students in 27 U.S. states. From the survey and literature, the S-E-O model has informed

researchers on the factors which influence community college male success (Harris and Wood, 2016). Furthermore, the S-E-O model accurately makes the connections between the relationships and interaction of the factors influencing community college male success.

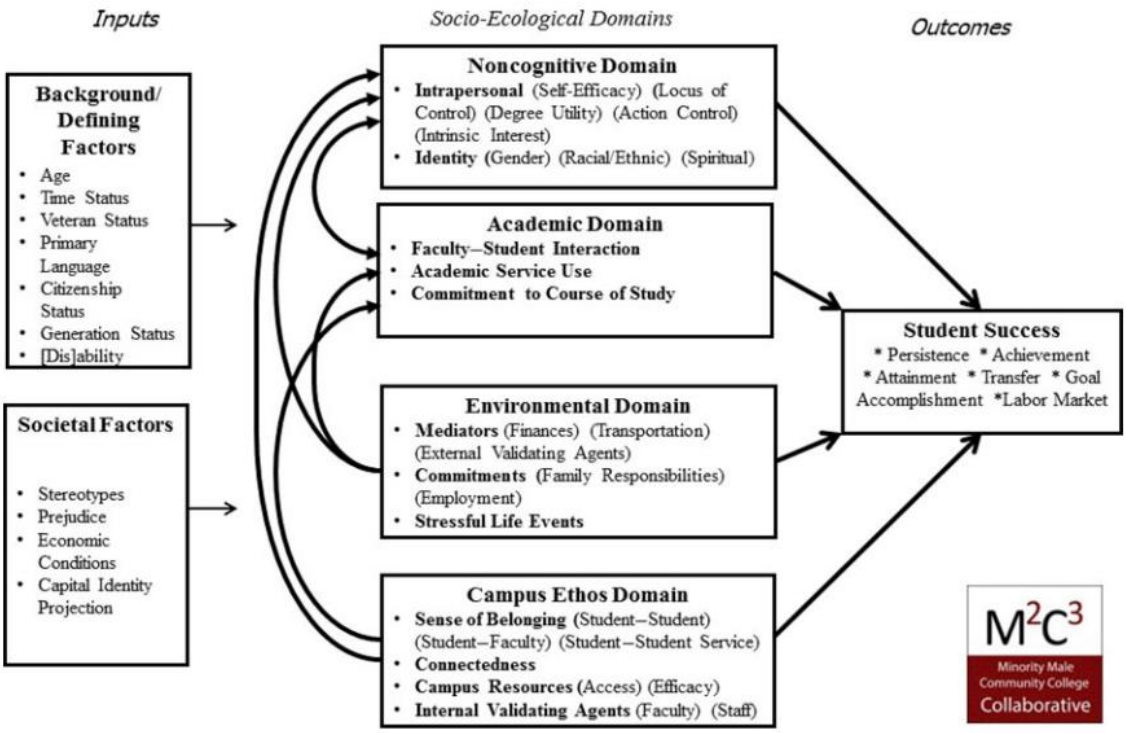


Figure 1.

SEO Model

Note: Harris, F., III and Luke Wood, J. (2016), Applying the Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model to the Student Experiences of Men of Color. New Directions for Community Colleges, 2016: 35-46. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20201

The S-E-O model consists of seven constructs (see Figure 1). Harris and Wood (2016) describe certain factors and experiences of men of color prior to entering higher education as the "inputs" of the model (e.g., age, gender, citizenship status, and enrollment status). Additionally,

these inputs also include societal factors which underscore the messaging about men of color in higher education. For example, Harris and Wood explain the influence of generalizations and stereotypes of men of color who attend colleges and universities on their overall success. Harris and Wood highlight previous research which suggests the prejudices associated with men of color leads this student population to question the legitimacy of their presence and their choice of college attendance.

Next, the S-E-O model identifies four socioecological domains at its core representing the factors that influence men of color's success once they have entered the community college. These domains include the noncognitive domain, academic domain, environment domain, and the campus ethos domain. With the S-E-O model, Harris and Wood (2016) identify the intersection of sociological and environmental factors that shape the experience of men of color at community colleges. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 1, Harris and Wood (2016) indicate the relationships and intersectionality of multiple domains. The noncognitive domain encompasses variables such as self-efficacy, locus of control, and intrinsic motivation for completion. This domain illustrates how a student internalizes their own knowledge, ability, and skills and how confident they are in such to be successful while enrolled in community college. The academic domain explains how men of color at community colleges utilizes and interfaces with all academic supports at their institutions. This includes the perceptions men of color have towards academic support services as well as how relationships are formed with faculty. The environmental domain involves other commitments (e.g., family and work obligations) of men of color while enrolled, primarily outside of the institution. Harris and Wood (2016) articulate the negative impacts of environmental factors such as unemployment, family loss, divorce, and financial instability on the success of men of color. Specifically, Harris and Wood (2016)

emphasize the importance of men of color having "validating agents" who ultimately serve as a support system for men of color during their academic careers. Lastly, the campus ethos domain includes the infrastructure in place at the institution to support men of color. Specifically, this includes all of the "policies, programs, resources, and practices" which influences the daily operations of the college in delivering its mission. Harris and Wood (2016) emphatically describe how the community college has the responsibility and obligation of providing a sustainable learning environment where students can be successful and learn. Within the S-E-O model, community colleges must provide adequate programs, resources, and tools to support men of color success. Beyond just providing such resources and infrastructure, Harris and Wood (2016) articulate the significance of men of color to have sufficient access to such resources in order to support success outcomes at the institution.

The final component and construct of the S-E-O model are the success outcomes which are the product of the experiences men of color bring into the institution combined with experiences across the four socioecological domains. Harris and Wood (2016) define success outcomes by persistence, completion, transfer rates, goal attainment, and workforce and labor market outcomes. Harris and Wood's (2016) S-E-O model takes into account the nonmonolith experiences of men of color and how the four domains are not operationalized in isolation. Harris and Wood (2016) indicate that colleges that institute specific programming geared towards men of color shall find the S-E-O model informative when implementing such programs such as the Minority Male Success Initiative.

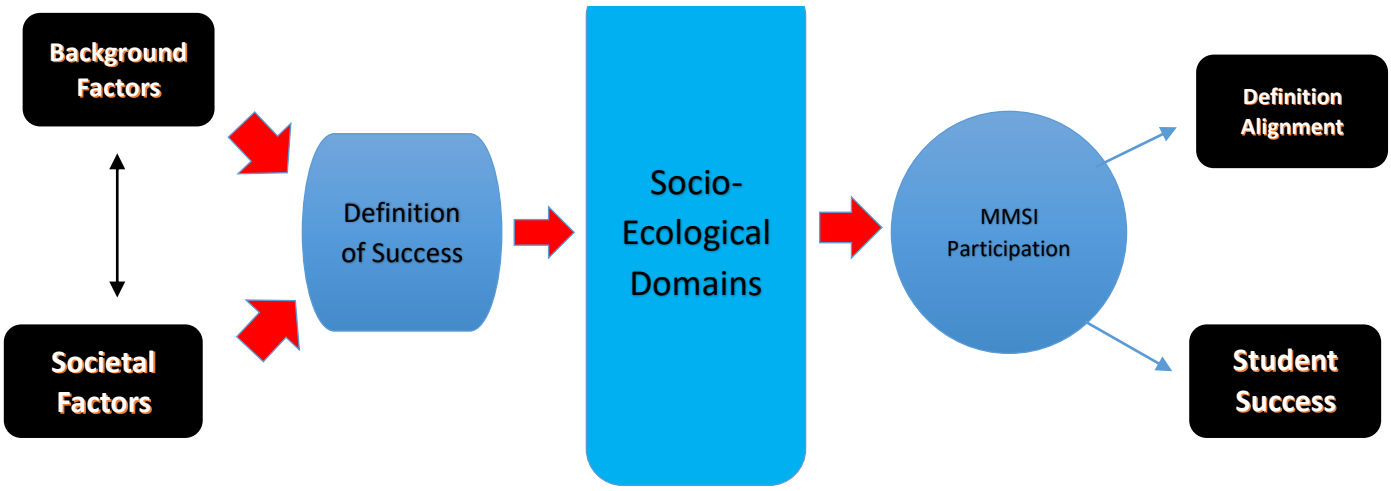
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study is derived from Harris and Wood (2016) S-E-O model and captures how participants in the study frame their experiences while attending

community college. Specifically, the conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between a man of color's inputs and the experiences that are brought into the institution and have the journey navigating the campus ethos including campus participation produce outcomes to influence their overall success. As the student navigates the campus environment, the student develops and creates their definition of student success. The willingness to participate in MMSI programs leads the student to be able to articulate how their decision to participate in MMSI programs meets or does not meet their personal definition of success. Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study built from the S-E-O model.

Figure 2.

Conceptual Framework for Study



Significance of the Study

Although there has been research conducted on minority males in higher education (Brooms, 2019; Card & Wood, 2019; Bush & Bush, 2010; Flowers, 2006), there is a gap in literature on the experiences of minority males attending community colleges. Additionally,

there is limited qualitative research on the Minority Male Success Initiative where the student voices and experiences are centered from the programmatic lens. Increased knowledge on the experiences of men of color attending North Carolina Community Colleges is important because understanding helps colleges inform institutional policies and practices needed to support this population. Known research by Watermark has focused on the Early Alert component to the MMSI program. This research is mainly quantitative in method in which this study would provide more qualitative data on the same population.

Limitations

A limitation of the study is the selection criterion of the participants. The participants are being selected based on their voluntary participation in the MMSI program. Given that participation in MMSI programming is a criterion for participants, there will be men of color whose experiences will not be captured in the study if they choose to not participate in any MMSI programming at the selected site.

Delimitations

The researcher selected one community college as a case study who is receiving grant funds for programmatic efforts within the Minority Male Success Initiative compared to selecting all colleges who have received grant funds within the Minority Male Success Initiative. This includes North Carolina community colleges who received grant funding for success coaches and an early alert system. The sample size of participants is much smaller than the number of minority males enrolled in community colleges thus cannot be representative of all minority male students currently enrolled in community colleges. Another delimitation of the study is that the researcher has selected the identified community college as the case which will be the focus of the qualitative case study. The community college for the study was chosen by

the researcher based on the college's continued participation in the MMSI program and receiving funding from the North Carolina Community College system.

Definition of Terms

North Carolina Community College System or *NCCCS* refers to the state system of North Carolina community colleges. The NCCCS comprises 58 community colleges across the state.

Minority Male Success Initiative or *MMSI* is an initiative from the North Carolina Community College System intended to increase the progression and completion rates of minority male community college students in North Carolina.

Men of color refers to an individual who identifies as male and African-American, Native American or Pacific Islander, Asian American, multiracial Americans, and Latino American

MyFutureNC is a nonprofit organization striving to increase educational attainment in North Carolina. MyFutureNC lists three main goals on their website including closing educational attainment gaps, improving educational outcomes for North Carolina citizens, and fostering the collaboration between North Carolina's education and business sectors.

EdNC refers to EducationNC, which is a North Carolina based organization that provides North Carolina residents and policymakers with critical research, data, and information to support North Carolina students. EdNC gathers and offers information related to major trends in the education sector of North Carolina.

PWI refers to Predominately White Institution.

BMI refers to Black Male Initiative. Some institutions of higher education have similar programs which focus on success outcomes for Black males.

CCP refers to Career and College Promise.

TRiO refers to federal outreach and student services programs designed to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate degrees.

Chapter Summary

Researchers and trend data reveal the decreased enrollment, persistence, and completion of men of color, particularly Black males at community colleges (Quattrocchi, 2022; Thomas & Taffe, 2021). With the MMSI program, the North Carolina Community College System is providing funding for programmatic efforts intended to directly address this issue and population of students. The following chapter provides a review of the researched experiences of men of color in higher education as well as the origins and outcomes of similar programs and initiatives.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine the experiences of minority men participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative program at one community college in the Southeast. The following literature review explores programs implemented across the United States on student success outcomes, mentoring and mentorship programs for men of color attending community colleges, and factors which contribute to student success including mentoring and mentoring programs. Additionally, the literature reviewed explored the collegiate experience of men of color including the influence of campus culture and climate on those experiences. Lastly, the literature review examined how institutions of higher education are addressing the needs of underrepresented students, namely Black, Latinx, Native, and Asian students and the impact of the global pandemic.

The Minority Male Community College Collaborative (M2C3) program was created in 2011 at San Diego State University because of the lack of research on community college men, the need to address disparities between minority men and their white counterparts, and the lack of attention given to understanding how to increase student success outcomes for minority men. Dr. J. Luke Wood (2012), a prominent champion of men of color success, added that much of the research prior to the creation of the M2C3 program focused on Black males in the following systems: K-12, HBCU, and 4-year institutions. This literature review focused primarily on the barriers to success for Black and Latinx males in higher education which revealed a lack of information from the community college perspective. Furthermore, Wood and Williams (2013) added that such a focus on Black males has left gaps in literature on the educational experiences of Native, Latinx, and Asian male students.

Academic and Social Integration

Flowers (2006) conducted a study on African-American males at 2-year and 4-year institutions and the impact of college attendance on social and academic integration. The study found that policies and practices at colleges and universities that do not promote African American student success must be analyzed. Furthermore, Flowers (2006) provided evidence that college administrators, such as advisors and counselors, can provide social experiences for first year African-American male students which could solidify their commitment to the institution. Flowers also identified the importance of preparation of incoming college students to the academic and social environments in college. A major contribution from Flowers'(2006) research is that although academic and social integration are important, they are more of a predictor of persistence for males attending 4-year institutions compared to 2-year institutions.

Bush and Bush (2010) indicated that a majority of African American male students begin their postsecondary education at community colleges. The study focused on African American male achievement at community colleges. The study found that institutional factors and campus climate play a significant role in the success of African American male students. Two key areas founded by Bush and Bush that correlate to determining student success are faculty interactions and campus climate. As Bush and Bush indicated, community colleges must cultivate an environment that is conducive of African American male student success.

Being a part of the makeup or fabric of an institution, students can experience greater social and academic integration. Wood's (2012) defined academic integration as the combination of a student's cognitive development and academic performance. Wood (2012) defines a student's social integration as how a student engages with the social aspect of campus, including interactions with peers, faculty, staff, and involvement in campus activities. Wood (2012) states

that student completion is directly tied to their level of commitment to personal and academic goals and commitment to the college or university. For minority male students, this integration can be challenging as there are external factors that significantly impact a student's experience. Working a job along with going to school, childcare needs, mental health concerns, lack of support navigating the college experience, as well as a general lack of academic preparation all can impact a student's success integrating into the institution. Ihekwaba (2001) focused on the persistence of Black male and female students at a community college in Texas where Ihekwaba's research indicated that Black male students are less likely to persist in college. Factored into this notion was that Black female students had higher levels of academic integration than Black male students. Qualitative research studies (Flowers, 2006; Harris & Wood, 2016; Ray et.al, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012;) have supported the idea that students who participated in campus and extracurricular activities while developing relationships with other students on campus were more likely to succeed.

According to Tinto (2016), students must possess the motivation to achieve their goals and the responsibility does not solely fall on colleges and universities for persistence. In the face of several challenges, students must be willing and able to put forth the effort in order to succeed. Tinto highlighted three areas which can be strong indicators or factors impacting persistence—self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perceptions of curriculum. Furthermore, Tinto argues that high levels of self-efficacy promote completion and degree attainment. Tinto articulated the importance of colleges and universities to employ early warning systems to identify students who may not be succeeding to intercede and provide support. Furthermore, Tinto (2016) emphasizes the need for colleges and universities to address these challenges prior

to self-efficacy issues which could certainly cause disruption and impact students' motivation to continue studying.

Wood and Newman (2017) indicated the majority of Black males utilized community colleges as their entry into higher education. Additionally, Wood and Newman point out that faculty to student engagement is a huge predictor of male student success in community colleges. Specifically, the study highlighted that the relationship between student and faculty members can positively impact academic motivation and efficacy. In studying the predicting factors of faculty-student engagement, Wood and Newman (2017) found several factors with significant correlation to the predictability. For example, students who were enrolled in more classes had higher levels of faculty engagement than students who were enrolled part-time. Similarly, students who worked part time had less interaction and engagement with faculty members.

Men of Color Experiences in Higher Education

Developing programs and experiences for community college students to get engaged can be challenging when community college students also have other obligations such as family and work commitments. For these programs and activities to be successful, community college leaders and administrators must account for the myriad of factors impacting the community college student experience.

The Community College Equity Assessment Lab from San Diego State University (CCEAL) in collaboration with the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of South California produced a report in 2017 identifying notable statistics for men of color. The report focused on 18-24-year-old males within the 113 campuses for California Community colleges. Specifically, Harris et. al (2017) found that men of color experience higher levels of food and housing insecurities. Harris et. al noted that over half of the men aged 18-24 experiencing

housing insecurities were Black men and that same group was composed of ⅓ Latino men. Similarly, with food insecurity in this age group, over 25% of Black men and over 10% of Latino men face this challenge. Navigating housing or food insecurities, along with disparities in the criminal justice system, can create additional challenges for men of color to succeed academically at community colleges. Harris III et. al (2017) points out that an emphasis being placed on understanding the experiences of men of color on community college campuses has led to policies and practices being created to specifically address this special population of students. The researchers also define the term "action control" as the confidence and belief that a student has that they will succeed while pursuing their academic goals (Harris III et. al, 2017). Additionally, the research team also indicated that campus climate and the overall campus environment directly impact student success. Furthermore, increased student interactions with faculty and staff leads to cultivated relationships where students' success can grow and cultivate.

Throughout the review of literature on the experiences of minority males in community colleges, environmental factors such as financial barriers and family obligations have been attributed as factors impacting the educational experiences of this population. In a phenomenological study of Latino males attending Texas community colleges, participants revealed the role of family support while navigating the college experience (Saenz et al.,2018). Specifically, Latino males attributed their family support as a motivator towards completion rather than a deficit given the lack of knowledge about college admissions and policies described by participants. Pressures related to academic achievement coupled with financial challenges were identified by participants; however, validation and inspiration from family served as motivating forces leading to increased confidence to thrive in school (Saenz et al., 2018). Latino males also identified struggles navigating the collegiate environment due to poor preparation in

high school along with having family with limited knowledge of institutional resources (Saenz et al., 2018). Participants also identified the need for mentoring to help in their collegiate journeys but experienced difficulty finding such resources available at their respective community colleges. (Saenz et al., 2018). Saenz et al. (2018) research presents findings indicating that men of color struggle with asking for help in navigating their experiences despite a strong ambition to succeed academically. Based on Saenz et. al's findings related to Latino males' apprehension of help seeking strategies from peers as well lends to additional research being conducted how relationship and community building amongst men of color impacts their collegiate experiences. Implementing programs and offering services that are geared towards improving success outcomes for Latino males and men of color at community colleges must remain a top priority for community college leaders. In creating such spaces and environments for men of color, community college leaders can help nurture relationship building and cultivating a sense of belonging.

Community College and University Partnerships

According to Jenkins and Fink (2016), roughly 32% of students complete their Associate's degree and transfer within 6 years. Sabay and Wiles (2020) stated higher education leaders at universities and community colleges must partner in coordinating efforts and services to support students from marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds. Sabay and Wiles (2020) examined a successful partnership between South College and the University of Washington and found the importance of institutions of higher education providing supportive services at the community college and university where a student may transfer. As a Minority Serving Institution (MSI), South College in Seattle, Washington has implemented TRiO programs for over 30 years. As one of the public community colleges in the Seattle area, South

College has been a leader in demonstrating equity through its Seattle Promise Scholarship where graduating seniors earn free tuition (Sabay & Wiles, 2020). Sabay and Wiles indicate that South College serves under 200 students who qualify to receive support through its TRiO Student Support Services program. With a successful pathway partnership with the University of Washington, over 80% of transfer students attended Washington based community colleges. When considering minority males who are currently attending community college, many of whom come from low-income backgrounds, the support provided through programs such as TRiO SSS are integral in achieving higher persistence and graduation rates. Through its academic advising support program, which assists community college students who are navigating complex systems on their path to degree completion, community colleges such as South have proven the benefits of providing TRiO programs on their campuses.

Community Colleges Serve as Entry Point into Higher Education

For many men of color, the entry into higher education begins at the community college (Strayhorn, T.L., 2012; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). The open access function of community colleges provides the opportunity for economic mobility for these students through job training and academic programs created to prepare students for joining the workforce. In his research, Wood (2012) explains that students' persistence can be negatively impacted by the lack of institutional support. Specifically, Wood (2011) highlights the significance of academic and social integration on the success of community college male students. When referencing African American students research that suggests this population will persist more in college with opportunities for social interactions and social activities. Furthermore, when support structures are in place on college campuses, African American male students can be successful. In a 2015 study on the completion patterns of African American and Latino men, Baber and Graham

(2015) found that the primary point of entry of African American and Latino males into higher education is through enrollment in community colleges. Although the study focused on enrollment and completion trends in the state of Illinois, Baber and Graham also found that men of color found support in aspirations to attend community college but that did not translate into comparable completion rates to white males. Furthermore, Baber and Graham's (2015) study emphasized how validation significantly impacts the experience of men of color on college campuses. Baber and Graham's study states that university leaders and personnel such as advisors and mentors must approach their work and interactions with men or color with the goal of holistic development. Specifically, Baber and Graham (2015) study reaffirmed the value in relationships between men of color attending community colleges with administrators and faculty where trust has been established.

Factors Impacting Student Success and Persistence

Although earlier researchers correctly forecasted an increase in enrollment of minority students in community colleges 20 years ago, several factors have impacted a decline in enrollment for certain populations, specifically Black men. To address this decline and understand why the decrease is happening, community colleges must provide several support structures for minority men to succeed. In recognizing the need for intentional support structures for minority men, these programs accentuate the importance of affirming self-efficacy and confidence to perform well academically. Minority male students, primarily African American men, often face additional challenges than traditional students. Ray et. al (2009) stated in their research that mentoring cannot be viewed through a single lens but rather occurs in a vicarious manner between peers and colleagues as well. Following Kuh's framework for campus

environments, mentoring programs have the potential to influence positive student outcomes. Kuh's criteria includes:

> (1) an institutional emphasis on providing students the support they need for academics and social success; (2) positive working and social relationships among different groups; (3) help for students in coping with their nonacademic responsibilities; and (4) high-quality student relationships with other students, faculty, and the institution's administrative personnel. (Ray et. al, 2009)

According to Ray et. al (2009), following Kuh's criteria would also address persistence and retention of African American male students. When students are connected to campus and feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to stay at that institution.

In *Advancing Black Male Student Success from Preschool through Ph.D., Harper* and Wood (2015) addresses concerns affecting the collegiate experience of Black males enrolled in community colleges. Harper and Wood (2015) breakdown their concern for the overall experience of Black males in community colleges into the following four areas:

- Community colleges not fulfilling obligations in supporting Black males.
- The responsibility for Black male student success rests largely on the institution.
- Dehumanizing portrayals of Black males which lead to stigmatized views from faculty and staff.
- Efforts to support Black men are often met with assumptions of applicability.

Harper and Wood (2015) challenge institutions of higher education to move from a cultural deficit perspective to one where Black male underachievement is not pinned on a student's background and family circumstances. Furthermore, shifting from this perspective removes the blame from the student's environment and ultimately student success outcomes are a product of

the college's doing. Additionally, Harper and Wood (2015) emphasize that Black males attending community colleges have different experiences than those who attend 4-year institutions, and the assumption of applicability can be troubling.

Harper and Wood (2015) also address academic factors that impact student success. Harper and Wood (2015) also indicate that in addition to the need for a positive campus climate, Black male students have to be engaged academically in order to succeed with consistent attendance being a strong indicator for success. Black males who have shown a commitment to studying as well as utilizing academic support services on campus are more likely to persist than those students who do not utilize those services.

Many scholars have indicated the importance of social integration as an indicator and predictor of student success. However, literature by Flowers (2006) indicated that academic and social integration are more impactful for Black males attending 4-year institutions compared to community colleges.

Two other barriers of student success that have been identified by many researchers on this topic include financial challenges as well as transportation challenges. Students who are experiencing financial difficulties often have to work one or more part time jobs to cover expenses which in turn takes time away from engaging with the campus environment compared to students who do not experience those same financial difficulties. Additionally, students who have long commute times to their respective campuses experience. Calcago et. al (2008) study analyzed the specific institutional characteristics that impact student success outcomes such as degree attainment, completion, and transfer to 4-year institutions.

Although many Black men who enter community college compared to 4-year institutions tend to be older, may have children, and have lower college preparation, require different

institutional supports in order to succeed academically and complete a degree (Wood & Williams, 2013). Wood and Williams (2013) explored the factors that impact persistence of Black community college students which identified four variables-- background, social, academic, and environmental. Wood and Williams (2013) define environment variables or factors as those forces outside of the institution which have a direct impact on the student experience. A key finding from this study indicated that the number of hours worked was a predictor of persistence. With this finding, Wood and Williams (2013) also pointed out the finding is not an endorsement that Black male community college students should carry heavy workloads, but rather part-time jobs may be a better option than holding full-time jobs while completing their studies. Caring for dependents compiled with managing stress were also identified as key environmental factors that predict persistence among Black males. Wood and Williams' (2013) recommendations for community college leaders center on prioritizing early warning systems and information gathering prior to enrollment which can help identify students who may need support in order to succeed. These actions, according to Wood and Williams (2013), better position faculty, staff, and college administrators to address barriers to persistence.

Impact of Faculty Validation

Researchers such as Wood (2019) and Bauer (2014) have conducted studies on the impact of faculty validation on the experiences of men of color. Additionally, studies have found (Card & Wood, 2019; Wood & Newman, 2017; Bauer, 2014) that faculty validation fosters success among men of color. Bauer (2014) makes the crucial point that students who are not engaged in the campus community outside of the classroom, their only real touchpoint on campus is with their professors and faculty members. Thus, it is imperative that community colleges continue emphasizing the importance of establishing relationships that positively impact

their experience. Bauer (2014) conducted a study utilizing Woods and Harris CCSM assessment tool in learning about the impact of faculty validation on Black male community college students. Bauer (2014) found that Black males who reported higher levels of validation from faculty members were more inclined to ask for help when needed. Additionally, students engaged more with faculty who articulated and shared their belief in these students' ability to thrive at the institution and truly belonged. For men of color, receiving validation can increase confidence and motivation to succeed which counters the negative messaging about perception that dominates our news cycles and is portrayed on social media.

Banks and Dohy (2018) reviewed practices that would increase persistence and retention rates for students of color. Banks and Dohy (2018) indicate that colleges and universities can close opportunity gaps for students of color by prioritizing creating belonging for students and having faculty incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy. Banks and Dohy explained that this could be achieved in many ways, including "high quality mentorship from faculty of color." Furthermore, culturally responsive instruction and curriculum is directly tied to having a diverse faculty and hiring faculty members of color (Banks and Dohy, 2018). Lastly, Banks and Dohy (2018) encourages colleges and university to approach improving persistence and graduation rates through creating equitable success outcomes for students rather than focusing on the deficits of students.

Defining Mentoring and Determining Its Impact

Although mentoring has been widely viewed as a practice that can promote student success, there has not been one definitive definition of mentoring. St. Clair (1994) described mentoring as a relationship where an experienced person provided support and modeling for a younger person. Additionally, St. Clair (1994) added that mentoring is a relationship where

knowledge is shared by a mentee with the goal of cultivating growth within the mentor. Furthermore, a mentor is often thought of as someone who has expertise in a particular subject area who can provide guidance. In an article about faculty members and professors being mentors to community college students, Galbraith and James (2004) state that "not all faculty members are disposed psychologically or intellectually to serve as mentors." Furthermore, the authors suggest that mentoring is more than merely providing advice. Galbraith and James describe mentoring as a compilation of six behavioral functions: to establish trust, offer advice, motivate, provide alternatives, encourage initiatives, and to challenge. According to Galbraith and James (2004), the established relationship between a mentor and mentee can enhance overall development through meaningful and purposeful interactions. As community colleges continue to explore ways to support men of color on their campuses, mentoring, in particular from faculty members of color, can be a powerful tool and worthy investment.

The value of mentoring and its benefits have been the focus of many researchers (Galbraith & James, 2014; Hoffman & Wallach, 2005; Ray et al., 2009). As many men of color enroll in community college as their introduction into higher education, primarily Black men, Torrens et. al suggests that institutions of higher education develop peer-mentoring initiatives as a means of supporting men of color on campus. However, there is a considerable lack of research on the impact of mentoring on minority males. Although the benefits of mentoring cannot be overstated, more literature on this topic is necessary to fully understand how men of color view and perceive being a mentor and a mentee.

Mentoring Programs and Initiatives

To improve minority male success outcomes across the nation's community colleges, multiple studies have concluded that community college leaders must institute programs,

initiatives, and interventions to address the needs of this population. A common intervention employed by community colleges has been to implement male success initiatives that include targeting programming, academic advising, and mentoring components. This section of literature highlights the various types of mentoring programs and their power on student success.

Several colleges and universities have created mentoring programs and initiatives to address the growing concern of low attrition and graduation rates of minority male students compared to their white counterparts as well as minority female students. This section will explore how different campuses have approached creating mentoring programs and how they have or have not contributed to overall student success.

Successful mentoring programs can be beneficial for minority male students. Specifically, these programs provide increased connectedness to the campus for students, as well as strengthen relationships with peers and faculty and staff members on campus. Many institutions of higher education have utilized mentoring programs as a retention and enrichment tool. Gibson (2014) explained that simple participation in some form of mentoring exposes students to new opportunities they may not have initially attempted to participate in. In one study conducted with CSUN students, participants indicated that participating in the mentoring program reduced intimidation about campus life that may have been concerning prior to attendance (Hoffman & Wallach, 2005). Additionally, the study states the significance of mentoring relationships being reciprocal and the commitment of mentors created a sense of consistency that nurtured the relationships (Hoffman & Wallach, 2005). Research completed by Hoffman and Wallach (2005) on the Compton Community College mentoring program indicates that when students improve their self-perceptions, they are more likely to be motivated to complete their educational goals. Furthermore, such programs require the financial backing and

support from senior level leadership. Without adequate funding, mentoring programs will not be sustained thus limiting the potential impact on its participants.

Mentoring relationships and programs can be administered in various ways using many implementation strategies and components where there is no one standard way. In an analysis of programming outcomes and intervention on college campuses intended to support men of color, Keflezighi et. al (2016) found that several minority male initiatives (MMI) programs shared common goals, such as academic advancement, professional development, personal growth, and transitioning to the collegiate environment. The analysis included a review of 129 MMI programs found through the American Association of Community College (AACC) database. Programs identified through the analysis were found on campuses throughout the United States with North Carolina representing the most MMI programs reviewed. Keflezighi et. al (2016) noted the scarcity of information pertaining to MMI programs and how their institutions support these programs. The research conducted in the study serves to provide information for best practices when developing initiatives to support men of color attending community colleges. From the 129 MMIs included in the research, only 83 were identified as distinct (Keflezighi et. al, 2016).

Former President Barack Obama recognized the increasing persistent gaps of men and boys of color which led to the My Brother's Keeper initiative being launched in 2014. The purpose of the program is to close the gap in order for young men and boys of color to achieve their full potential. This includes mentoring, strategic programming, while providing opportunities to be better prepared for K-12 education, college, and the workforce. Although programs such as My Brother's Keeper are funded primarily through private and philanthropic efforts (source about funding), federal programs such as TRiO Programs provide support for

many marginalized students. According to its website, eight programs make up TRiO designed to provide academic support for students who identify as low-income or first-generation. Institutions of Higher Education are among the group of organizations that may receive grants to support the implementation of some TRiO programs on their campuses. One of the TRiO programs implemented at institutions of higher education is TRiO Student Support Services. With the goal of increasing persistence rates with qualified students, institutions that receive grants for TRiO TSS programs support students through tutoring, advising support, and mentoring. Furthermore, the purpose of TRiO TSS programs also includes motivating students towards degree attainment.

Keflezighi et. al (2016) analysis also found that common program features across the MMI programs included mentoring and professional skill development. Specifically, nearly 65% of programs evaluated contained a mentoring program which included various types of mentoring. Those mentoring components included peer mentoring, faculty members serving as mentors, and mentoring where industry professionals were matched with students.

From this study, Keflezighi et. al (2016) found that over 50% had multiple funding streams with most programs being funded by three or more funding sources. The significance of this literature illustrates a barometer for how community colleges prioritize minority male success through financial commitment to these efforts. The two most popular funding streams for MMI programs include campus funds and private gifts. Additionally, the analysis found that at least 10 of the institutions funded MMI programs using student fees which presents the conundrum that students are in part funding programs intended for their success. Through the evaluation of these MMI programs, Wood indicates that several programs identify performance outcomes and affective outcomes compared to learning outcomes. Specifically, the research

study identified common performance outcomes such as completion, retention, and graduation rates. Furthermore, the study revealed effective outcomes tied to goals of the studied MMI program to include locus of control, sense of belonging and connectedness to campus, and the confidence to thrive in the academic environment (Keflezighi et. al, 2016).

Utilizing Keflezighi et. al (2016) research on MMIs, community colleges can be better equipped with measuring their current programs and their overall effectiveness as well as if they are meeting established outcomes. Furthermore, effective MMI program evaluation, such as using the matrix produced by the study (Keflezighi et. al, 2016), could provide community colleges with critical information about the experiences of minority male participants in reaching performance goals and outcomes.

The campus environment and overall campus climate plays an integral role in the experience of men of color at community colleges (Brooms, 2019). Brooms (2019) states that challenges related to racism, discrimination, and microaggressions positions men of color, particularly, Black males to seek support and direction within communities on campus that reflects their culture. It is through these communities that Black males find the networks which ultimately aids them towards persistence in college and achieving their goals (Brooms, 2019). Brooms' study focused on Black Male Initiative programs which are intended to support Black males on college campuses through their collegiate journeys. As Brooms points out, BMI programs can be institution specific and are designed to support the needs of students including identity development and building peer relationships. Findings from Brooms' study indicate that BMI programs positively impacted their collegiate experience through its intentional efforts to support peer interactions and peer mentoring. Furthermore, participants from Brooms' study expressed feeling like they mattered and how valuable the information received helped navigate

campus life. Males in the BMI programs felt as though the information and knowledge learned closed the gap between the knowledge and support their family could provide and their personal needs to thrive at their respective institutions (Brooms, 2019). Black males are not a monolith, coming to college campus with different experiences, backgrounds, and traits. Black Male Initiative programs and those which are similar provide the space for Black males to build the social capital researchers identify as key in their success (Brooms, 2019). Participants in Brooms' study associated their engagement with BMI programs with their success, growth, and persistence while in college. Although participants in Brooms' study all attended predominantly white institutions, their experiences can be translated to Black males attending different institution types including community colleges. Furthermore, institutions of higher education must position themselves to adequately provide services, opportunities, and spaces for men of color to develop community and build relationships with one another. Institutional leaders must be invested in not only providing these spaces but also committed to learning how Black males and men or color define their success coupled with providing learning experiences. Brooms' (2019) highlights the connection between the sense of belonging for Black males and the emotional vulnerability revealed from participating in the Black Male Initiative program. Participants found solidarity and comfort in seeing others who look like them on campus who share similar experiences and demonstrated a genuine sense of care for their well-being.

Global Pandemic Impact on Higher Education

By the end of January 2020, only two cases of the novel coronavirus were found in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). At that time, the severity of the coronavirus and the upending of our society was relatively unknown. By the end of March 2020, the World Health Organization and declared COVID-19 a pandemic due to the high

numbers of cases and deaths. As states began to shut down due to the pandemic, institutions of higher education had to adjust and make contingency plans to maintain operations while delivering course instruction to students. Browning et al. (2021) conducted a study that sought to understand the psychological impacts of COVID-19 on university students. The study included over 2500 students provided responses to the questionnaire which sought to gain information about how students felt at the time of survey with how they felt before the pandemic. Students revealed several impacts including an increased lack of motivation, lack of social interaction, and increased anxiety (Browning et al., 2021). Furthermore, students revealed heightened levels of depression and feelings of isolation. Students who participated in the study also revealed stress related to finances as many lost their jobs and struggled to make ends meet during the pandemic. The study's findings indicated that students felt worried about their academics, how to succeed academically in an online environment, as well as how to pay for college. Browning et al. (2021) implores university administrators and decision makers to explore interventions that helps students manage stress and anxiety levels. Furthermore, Browning et al. (2021) indicates that institutions of higher education should prioritize student mental health concerns and addressing mechanisms that promote student success outcomes.

Although Browning et al. (2021) provided key insights into the psychological impact of COVID-19 on university students, Jones et al. (2022) conducted a study on the impact of COVID-19 on Black students. As Jones et al. (2022) states, Black college students were a subgroup of the population that may have been overlooked given the amount of attention placed on other subgroups including older adults given the amount of exposure to the coronavirus. Jones' et al. (2022) study consisted of 46 participants from two institutions in the Southern United States. Participants of the study were comprised of students from a Predominately White

Institution and a minority serving institution (Jones et al., 2022). Jones et al. (2022) found that Black students participating in the study reported high levels of stress due to academic rigor and challenges with a shifting learning environment. The researchers also state that Black students during this time experienced heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression given conflating issues related to racism that students also reported experiencing. Although both studies (Jones et al., 2022; Browning et al., 2021) identified students experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety, both call for higher education leaders to develop programs and provide resources to support student mental health.

Chapter Summary

As some researchers (Strayhorn, T.L., 2012; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012) have indicated, community college has served as the entry point for men or color into higher education. In recent years, attention and research on men of color attending community colleges has increased which has led to the development and implementation of several programs, interventions, and institutions to address the needs of this population. This literature review explored the experiences of men of color, primarily Black and Latinx males, upon their entry to higher education institutions and factors that impact their success. Additionally, the literature reviewed programs and initiatives that are intended to support men of color and the outcomes associated with men or color achievement, primarily in community colleges. Lastly, the literature reviewed provided insight into the impact of COVID-19 on college students. The following chapter will explain the methodology used for the student including the research design, data collection, and data analysis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the experiences of men of color participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative at Dream Community College which is a community college within the North Carolina Community College System. The research explored how participants actively engaged in MMSI programmatic efforts perceive how institutional programming efforts influences their overall success. Yin (2018) defined a case study as a research method that conducts a deep investigation of a particular phenomenon or "case" through the real-world context where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not evident. Furthermore, a case study method was appropriate for this study as the researcher was investigating and seeking understanding about how men of color perceive their participation with targeted programming influenced their personal definition of success. This chapter explains the methodology for this single case study, including the research design, information related to participant selection, data collection, as well as data analysis.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of minority males participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative?

Research Question 2: What programmatic efforts do minority males participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative believe contribute to their success and persistence?

Research Design

A qualitative research design was most appropriate for this study as the purpose was to understand the experiences of men of color attending community colleges who are participating in intentional programming aimed at increasing their student success outcomes. Creswell and

Poth (2018) suggest that qualitative research is conducted where there is a need for understanding the contexts and settings that address a specific program. For this study, the problem statement emphasizes that with declining enrollment for men of color at community colleges, coupled with significantly lower graduation and persistence rates compared to white counterparts, these gaps will persist which has lasting effects on the viability for the quality of life. For this study, the case or phenomenon being studied is the Minority Male Success Initiative program at Dream Community College (pseudonym), a North Carolina community college in the southeastern United States. Merriam and Tisdale (2016) emphasized that qualitative research focuses on how individuals make meaning of their experiences within their own constructed worldview. For this study, the emphasis was placed on understanding the experiences of men of color, how men of color develop their personal definition of student success and how they perceive their involvement with Minority Male Success Initiative programs supports their definition of success. Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdale (2016) add that the purpose of qualitative research is to explore the "understanding of how people make sense out of their lives," and for the researcher to explain how "people interpret their experience". By exploring the participation of men of color in Minority Male Success Initiative sponsored programs, the interpretation of their experience explored how participation influenced their success.

Merriam and Tisdale (2016) also define a case study as an analysis of a bounded system. Given this definition from Merriam and Tisdale (2016), the phenomenon must be bound to be considered an actual case. To be bounded according to Merriam and Tisdale (2016), there is a specific finite amount of data that can be collected. Specifically, the population of participants is bounded by identifying as a minority male student who is currently enrolled at Dream

Community College and participated in a specific program sponsored by the Minority Male Success Initiative.

Data Collection

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe data collection as a series of connected activities culminating in gathering data to address a study's research questions. Included in Creswell's and Poth's (2018) connected activities were collecting data, secure data storage, record keeping, purposeful sampling, and individual and cite locations. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize the significance of data collection as a series of interrelated and intricate activities beyond just conducting interviews. Purposeful sampling was utilized in determining the specific community college as the site. Specifically, the researcher identified a number of North Carolina community colleges who have applied and received funding from the North Carolina Community College System designated for supporting the Minority Male Success Initiative at their respective campus. From the Minority Male Success Initiative, Dream Community College was selected for the study's site given the college's receipt of the Minority Male Success Initiative grant and the intended purpose of instituting targeted programming to support men of color success outcomes. Additionally, it should be noted that Dream Community College did not receive the Minority Male Success Initiative grant in the previous grant cycle. Although Dream Community College would be in the first year of the new Minority Male Success Initiative grant cycle, the college has maintained programmatic efforts to support men of color. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that purposeful sampling is reflective of the researcher's intentions of learning the most information possible. As such, Dream Community Colleges was selected for the study based on the college's participation in the Minority Male Success Initiative program which enabled the researcher to

best inform the problem addressed by the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Lastly, a "gatekeeper" with Dream Community College demonstrated a willingness to participate in the study.

Data collection for this study included semistructured interviews, a program observation, and a review of documents and artifacts from the North Carolina Community College System and Dream Community College related to their overall programming connected to the Minority Male Success Initiative. These documents included a review of the Dream Community College MMSI website, annual reports, and marketing materials for programs. Patton (2015, as cited in Merriam and Tisdell, 2018) provides the following explanation for the significance of interviews:

"We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe…We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions…We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things." (p. 108).

Interviews

Semistructured individual interviews were conducted with each of the seven (7) participants. Two of the seven interviews occurred at Dream Community College in person. The researcher worked with a "gatekeeper" at Dream Community College who was able to secure an office for the interviews to take place. The remaining five interviews were conducted using Zoom video conferencing. The interviews conducted via Zoom were not recorded using the Zoom software but with the same recording device as the other interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe an interview for qualitative research as an "attempt to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world." According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), semistructured interviews allow the

researcher to gather specific information from participants although also providing the flexibility of responding to new ideas as they emerge from the participants. An interview guide and protocol (See Appendix C) were utilized to obtain specific information related to participants' experiences while participating in MMSI programming. Interviews were recorded using a recording device and stored in an encrypted folder on a secure Google drive from NC State University.

Observations

Creswell and Poth (2018) identify observations as another tool for collecting data in qualitative research. The researcher consulted with the "gatekeeper" at Dream Community College to get a schedule of programs being offered through the Minority Male Success Initiative. The researcher did not receive a full list of available programs to attend but was invited to attend one program in April 2023. The researcher was a nonparticipant observer for the program observation (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This allowed the researcher to watch and observe the physical setting, activities, and conversations of all participants while taking field notes of the interactions. Using Creswell and Poth (2018) techniques for observations, the researcher crafted and used an observation protocol (See Appendix D) to properly and ethically record notes, thoughts, and observations.

Participant Recruitment

Upon the Institutional Review Board approval from North Carolina State University, the researcher ensured proper approval from Dream Community College's equivalent to an Institutional Research Board to prevent any delay in contacting participants for the study. The researcher had to utilize the "gatekeeper" to learn the appropriate contacts at Dream Community College in order to complete the Institutional Review Board process. The researcher then

contacted the “gatekeeper” at Dream Community College for assistance to solicit information for men of color that fit the criteria of the study. The “gatekeeper” at the community college is the professional staff person who has direct oversight over the Minority Male Success Initiative programming efforts. The researcher solicited direct access to all enrolled men of color who are active participants in the Minority Male Success Initiative programming efforts. The “gatekeeper” distributed a flyer (Appendix K) to men of color who were connected to MMSI to solicit interest in participating in the study. The recruitment flyer included a QR code which directed interested men to a demographic survey (See Appendix J) to complete. The demographic survey was created using a North Carolina State University license for Qualtrics. The researcher used the survey to review if participants met the criteria of the study. The researcher then selected participants based on meeting the criteria while considering a diversity of background including age, program of study, and other factors. The researcher contacted all participants via email to describe the study, the purpose of the study, and the involvement criteria for full participation. An email was sent to confirm a participant’s interest in the study. The researcher aimed to have at least 7 to 11 participants from Dream Community College to conduct the study. Following affirmative responses from interested participants, the researcher confirmed a date, time, and location of the interview. The researcher also provided a $30 Amazon e-gift card to participants upon completing the individual interview.

Data Analysis

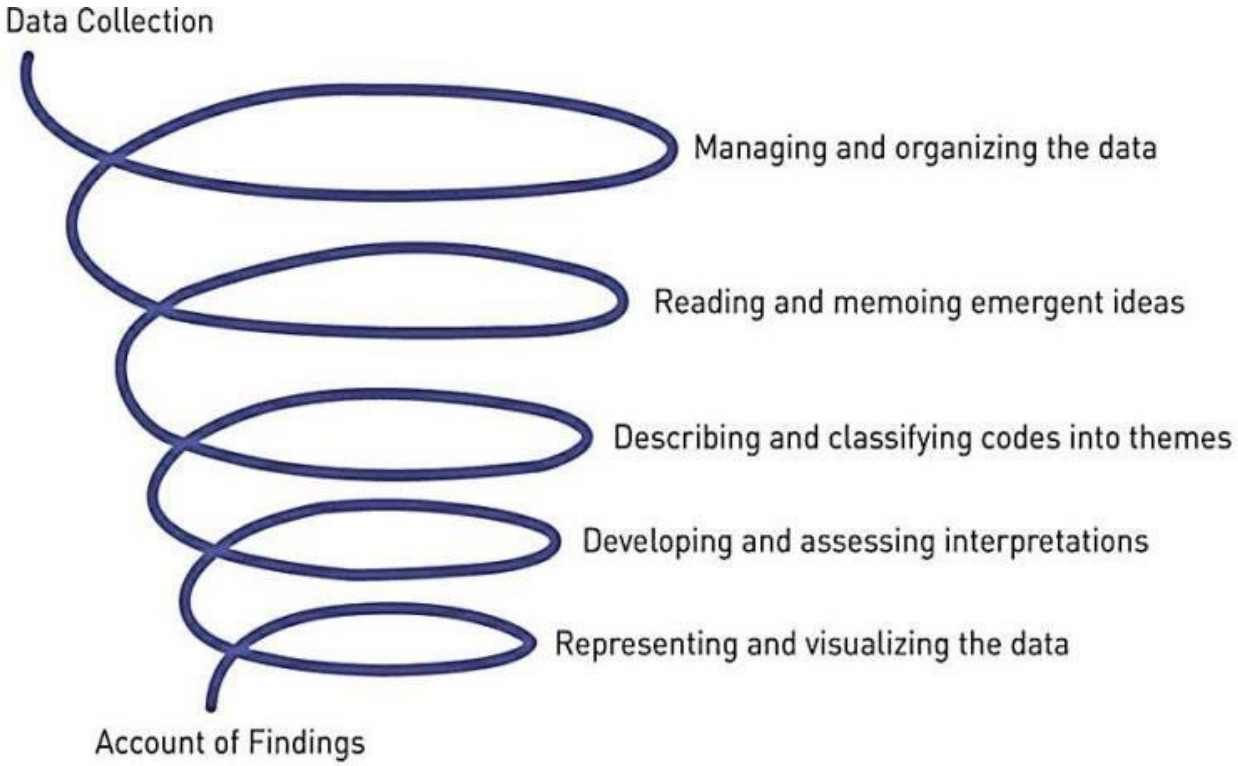
Merriam and Tisdell (2016) states that data analysis is the “process of making sense out of data.” The two research questions identified will be answered through semistructured interviews and a program observation. All interviews were audio recorded for verbatim translation using REV.com’s platform. Upon complete translation of all interviews, the

transcripts were provided to all participants for verification and accurate representation of their interview and viewpoint. For a first round review of the interview transcripts, the researcher read, reviewed, and made initial thoughts about the data for later identification of emergent categories and themes. Given the large amount of data that was collected via interviews, the Dedoose software tool was utilized to code the data and clearly present emergent themes.

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe data analysis as a process consisting of organizing data, reducing the data through coding, and representing the data with figures, tables, or discussion (p.185). Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2018) describe the data analysis process using a spiral for generating analytic outcomes. According to Creswell and Poth, the researcher moves through the steps in a spiral going around and around as opposed to taking a linear approach (p. 185). Figure 3 provides a visual of the data analysis spiral as described by Creswell and Poth (2018).

Figure 3. Data Analysis Spiral

Note: Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Fourth edition.). SAGE.



Managing Data

The first loop in the data analysis spiral is developing a plan and strategy for data management (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this research study, the researcher developed a naming system for all files which were stored in a secured, password protected, digital folder on the North Carolina State University secured server with two-factor authentication. This folder served as the central hub for all data collected throughout the study. In addition to this, a case study database held all data, documents, field notes, and artifacts used in data collection.

Reading and Memoing Emergent Ideas

The second loop in the data analysis spiral consists of reading and memoing once data has been collected and organized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, reading and digesting interview text provides the opportunity to "build a sense of the data as a whole" prior to any coding occurring (p. 188). A preliminary review of all interview transcripts occurred prior to the coding process. Lastly, creating memos and notes provided the researcher with an audit trail that

can provide validity through the duration of the study. The researcher utilized the Dedoose, cloud-based software, to upload participant interview transcriptions in order to analyze the data.

Describing and Classifying Codes Into Themes

The third loop in the data analysis spiral after memoing is to describe, classify, and interpret the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The authors describe the coding process as making sense of the data collected through interviews and observations (Creswell & Poth, p. 190). Following the in vivo coding method described by Saldana (2016), the researcher coded the interview transcripts using the words from the participants that describe their experiences. A second round of axial coding was completed in order to categorize the data before determining themes. Lastly, the researcher utilized the Dedoose software to organize codes, develop categories, track meaningful participant quotes, in order to develop themes in the data.

Developing and Assessing Interpretations

The next loop in the data analysis spiral is developing interpretations of the data. Interpreting data comes after the organization of themes in the data to develop a larger sense of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From the data analysis of participant interviews and the program observation, the researcher used an interpretive process to make meaning of the experiences seen, learned, and read. These interpretations and meaning making provided answers to the stated research questions.

Representing and Visualizing the Data

The last loop of the data analysis spiral is to represent and visualize the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using the Dedoose software, the researcher was able to develop figures and tables to visually capture what the data represents from the study. Additionally, from the data analysis

process, the researcher arrived at generalizations that the reader can learn of the experiences of men of color who participated in MMSI programming at Dream Community College.

Sample Population

Participants for this study consisted of enrolled students at Dream Community College and met the following criteria:

- Enrolled student at the Minority Male Success Initiative grant funded community college
- Completed at least one semester of courses
- Identified as a male student of color
- Enrolled student who has attended at least one MMSI sponsored program

Researcher Positionality Statement

The researcher is a student affairs practitioner who identifies as an African American male. The researcher was raised in a two-parent household with both parents completing their respective college degrees. The researcher's father's highest degree attainment is a master's degree in counseling which was completed when the researcher was in middle school (grades 6-8). The researcher's mother completed a bachelor's degree at the age of 65, returning to complete her degree after having six children. The researcher currently works at a higher education institution and completed his undergraduate and graduate degrees at a 4-year predominantly white institution (PWI). During the researcher's undergraduate and graduate careers, he has participated in clubs and organizations specifically targeted and created for Black males. Two of the organizations that were paramount in his undergraduate experience was Students for Minority Outreach (SMO) and Brothers of a New Direction (BOND). Involvement in these organizations provided a space for the researcher to be with other students of color; to have dialogue about their experiences ,and to build friendships. As a graduate

student, the researcher advised a student organization sponsored for students of color named the Black Student Alliance. As an African American male, the researcher recognizes he may experience the same traumas, discrimination, and experiences navigating the world as participants in the study. The researcher believes this study will greatly add scholarly research to inform practices for the betterment of men of color in higher education. It is the researcher's belief that when men of color have the knowledge and awareness of campus resources, adequate programming, as well as access to institutional support systems, this population can achieve personal and academic success.

Trustworthiness

Yin (2018) states the use of multiple sources of evidence strengthens the case study approach. Furthermore, Yin (2018) indicates that validity is demonstrated in the research study through its use of multiple sources of evidence. Data for the study was gathered through a personal program observation and individual interviews. Data triangulation of multiple sources of data were used in the study to establish trustworthiness and credibility. Data for the study was collected using a program observation and individual interviews with participants. Yin (2018) also describes the principle of maintaining a chain of evidence to increase the study's construct validity. Maintaining a chain of evidence will allow the reader to track the progress of the study from the research questions to the findings and vice versa (Yin, 2018).

The researcher utilized member checking as another tool and strategy to establish credibility of the study. Each participant received a complete transcript of their respective individual interview via email. Each participant was asked to read the interview transcript to check for accuracy and their words captured their feelings, thoughts, and experiences truthfully. All participants replied that their words were captured accurately which contributed to the

integrity of the study. The researcher strived to ensure validity and reliability of the study by conducting each phase of this process with the highest ethical standards (Merriam & Tisdell, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology conducted in this qualitative case study. Additionally, the chapter provided a description of the research design, data collection and data analysis strategies that were implemented, as well as a positionality statement about the researcher. Lastly, the chapter provides an explanation of how the study will demonstrate trustworthiness through validity and reliability.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine the experiences of minority males participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI) at Dream Community College. The researcher explored how seven (7) participants engaged in MMSI programmatic efforts perceive institutional programming efforts on their overall success (e.g., persistence, graduation, grades). To protect the confidentiality and security of the institution and participants, the site for the study, the pseudonym "Dream Community College" is being used. To answer the research questions, data were collected and analyzed from semistructured interviews with seven (7) MMSI participants and an MMSI program observation at Dream Community College. This chapter will describe profiles of each participant in addition to providing a detailed description of the findings and themes based on the data provided from participant interviews and the program observation that answer the study's research questions.

Participant Profiles

The following section provides an overview of the seven (7) participants who were interviewed for the study. To be selected to participate in the study, each participant met the criteria for participation which included being at least eighteen (18) years of age, completed at least one semester of coursework at the community college, identify as man of color, and attended one MMSI sponsored program or meeting. Based on the results of a completed demographic survey, each participant confirmed their eligibility to participate in the study. Other demographic information collected included: an assigned pseudonym to protect identity, major or program of study, GPA, anticipated graduation date, number of semesters involved with MMSI programming, and a range of the number of MMSI programs or meetings attended. The individuals were from a range of majors. All but one of the students were full-time and there

were a mix of first-generation students. The participants participated in a variety of different program types including dual enrollment, transfer, associates. Their GPAs ranged from 2.1 to 3.8. The participants attended a varying amount of MMSI programing. Table 1 includes a chart of all demographic data collected from participants.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Data

Name	Major	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Enrollment	Program Type	GPA	MMSI Program Length	MMSI Programs	First Generation
Felix	Entrepreneurship	Male	African-American	Full-Time	Dual Enrollment	3.4	1-2 Semesters	3-5 Programs	Yes
Shawn	Management Information Systems	Male	African-American	Full-Time	Transfer to 4 Year	2.1	1 Semester	1 Program	Yes
Cody	IT: Technical Support	Male	African-American	Full-Time	Dual Enrollment	2.7	1-2 Semesters	1-3 Programs	No
Swift	Entrepreneurship	Male	African-American	Part-Time	Associates	3.8	1 Semester	1 Program	No
George	Personnel Management	Male	African-American	Full-Time	Associates	3.03	1-2 Semesters	3-5 Programs	Yes
John	Electronics Engineering Technology/Industrial Technology	Male	African-American	Full-Time	Associates	3.6	3-4 Semesters	1-3 Programs	No
Carlton	Construction Management	Male	African-American	Full-Time	Transfer to 4 Year	2.8	1-2 Semesters	1-3 Programs	No

Participant #1 - Felix. Felix is a 21-year-old African American male, majoring in Entrepreneurship with a current 3.4 GPA. Felix shared that he has been involved or participated in MMSI programming for 2 semesters. Felix is a dual enrolled student currently with a goal of completing his Associate's degree.

Participant #2 - Shawn. Shawn is a 20-year-old African American male, majoring in Management Information Systems. Shawn enjoys computers, video games, and wrestling. Shawn has been involved with MMSI programming for 1 semester and has a goal of transferring to a 4-year university in North Carolina after finishing his Associate's degree.

Participant #3- Cody. Cody is a 21-year-old African American male student, majoring in IT: Technical Support with a current 2.7 GPA. Cody enjoys playing video games, being involved on

campus, and running his own podcast and YouTube channel. Cody has been involved in MMSI programming and meetings for 2 semesters. Cody's goal is to complete his Associate's degree and join the workforce.

Participant #4 - Swift. Swift is a 30-year-old African American male student majoring in Entrepreneurship. Swift currently has a 3.8 GPA and has been involved in MMSI programming and meetings for 1 semester. Most of Swift's time outside of the classroom is operating his own residential and commercial cleaning business which he started during the pandemic.

Participant #5- George. George is a 28-year-old African American male, majoring in Personnel Management. George has a current 3.03 GPA. George has been involved in MMSI programming for more than 3 semesters. George's goal is to complete his Associate's degree and enter the workforce within human resources.

Participant #6 - John. John is a 45-year-old African American male student currently majoring in Electronics Engineering Technology/Industrial Technology. John is a retired veteran who is pursuing his Associate's degree. John shared that he has been involved with MMSI programming for 1 semester. John currently has a 3.6 GPA.

Participant #7- Carlton. Carlton is a 21-year-old African American male majoring in construction management. Carlton has a current 2.8 GPA and has a goal of transferring to a 4-year university in North Carolina. Carlton enjoys playing football and has been involved in MMSI programming and meetings for 2 semesters.

Research Questions

The study looked to address the following two research questions pertaining to the experiences of men of color who participate in MMSI at Dream Community College:

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of men of color who participate in MMSI programs?

Research Question 2: What programmatic efforts do men of color participating in MMSI programs believe contribute to their success and persistence?

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed from semistructured interviews with seven (7) participants. Semistructured interviews were conducted at Dream Community College and via Zoom video conferencing. Based on the participant's availability, the option was given to each participant to meet virtually or in-person. During an on-site visit to Dream Community College to observe an MMSI sponsored program, the researcher conducted two on-site interviews. The remaining five (5) semistructured interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing. The researcher utilized a gatekeeper at Dream Community College to secure a meeting location to conduct the semistructured interviews in person. All interviews were conducted between April 2023 and July 2023. The seven (7) participants were selected based on meeting the eligibility criteria for the study after completing the demographic survey. Two (2) students completed the demographic survey and met the study's criteria but were unresponsive when attempting to schedule an interview. Each interview was professionally transcribed and thoroughly read by the researcher. Upon a first round of reading each interview, the researcher did a second round of reading and journaled initial thoughts from the data. The researcher also sent each participant via email a copy of the transcribed interview for member checking. Each participant read their transcribed interview and replied via email that the transcription was accurate and reflected their responses during the interview. Following two rounds of coding, the researcher identified the emergent themes to summarize the major findings of the study.

Defining Success

In order to answer the research questions for the study, understanding each participant's definition of success was paramount. Each participant was asked to define success and how their definition of success has been informed or influenced by life experiences. Based on how each participant defines success, the researcher sought to understand if there was congruence between their definition of success and the participant's expected outcomes of being participatory and engaged with campus programming through MMSI.

Felix shared his definition of success as,

> …for the most part, I'm real content. So success, as long as I'm passing, I'll pretty much be happy with that. In the long-run I just want to have enough to support myself, and maybe a Hellcat. That's pretty much my final goal.

Shawn defined success as,

> Well, I personally think when it comes down to success, it's not all about the money. Most people think it will say money, I feel like when it comes down to being successful, it feels like when your life is complete. You've done everything you wanted to do, you've been everywhere you wanted to go, you did all the things that you wanted to do. That's how I'd probably think how I've been successful in life, it was in everything.

Another participant, Cody added,

> My personal definition of success is not necessarily knowing that you have achieved the goal that you want to achieve but knowing that you've tried to achieve that goal and seeing the progress that you've made towards achieving that goal is what defines success in my eyes. People can achieve one thing, consider themselves successful, and still be far from what their end goal is. The real thing of success is knowing that you've made at

least some progress towards the goal. Even if it's just a little bit, I call that success. Rather take one win out of 10, then take no wins at all, in my mind.

Swift offered the following definition of success,

> I think success is when you can be at peace with where you are and satisfied. When you can be at peace and satisfied, because some people... You got to be satisfied where you are. And that could be at any job, at any business, at any location, satisfied where you are and at peace. And I don't think you can be at peace when you're over here and you're trying to rob Paul to pay Peter, and you are unsatisfied with who you live with and you're unsatisfied with how successful you are. When you're unsatisfied, you can't be satisfied. And I believe when you're satisfied and when you're at peace, I think that's when you have reached a level of success.

George and John offered simpler definitions, stating, “When I see others succeeding around me or the things I'm implementing,” and “Making a commitment to something no matter how long it takes,” respectively.

Lastly, Carlton shared that

> so to me, when I hear the word success, so I think of a lonely path. And what I mean by that, I mean... It is actually a quote. The quote is, "The path to be successful can be lonely but it's about being lonely to where, that's where your greatest challenge is... greatest challenges are. And on top of that, trying to get the words right. Success to me is more of how hard are you willing to strive for the things you want? Because the path to being successful, it's never going to be easy. Things are not just going to get handed to you. You actually have to work mentally, physically, spiritually, anything of that sort. Path to being successful comes in different shapes and forms. Doesn't always have to be money,

> doesn't have to be strength, doesn't always have to be perfect wisdom. It could be something that you feel will bring you the greatest joy, something that makes you be most happy. Something where you can find complete happiness in. And even then, it still won't be enough because there's so much more you can do.

Participants of the study each define success based on their life experiences and family influence. Additionally, participants equated success with achievement and accomplishing their goals. Furthermore, participants did not equate their success solely based on monetary gain or equating success to how much money they may earn. Participants of the study also connected success with helping and serving others as well as synonymous with happiness.

The responses from the study's participants regarding their interpretations of success revealed some shared viewpoints across the participants. Some commonalities seen in the data viewed success from an intrinsic perspective connected to personal contentment and a sense of satisfaction. When viewing the participants holistically, being content with one's life, setting and accomplishing objectives, or experiencing achievement was success. Many of the participants viewed the journey to with progress and dedication to the effort success rather than just the end point, this could be seen with continuous improvement. Success was also contented to the feeling of being at peace, tranquil, and at harmony with their personal situations. Although not all, some did stress financial stability and monetary goals, and these variety of viewpoints, provides evidence that success is unique, nuanced, and not the same for everyone. Life experiences and values shaped the participants views.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of men of color who participate in MMSI programs?

Based on Research Question 1, four themes were identified in the data. The themes were pursuit of higher education, impact of the global pandemic on shaping the journey, authentic support from faculty and staff, and student status being an indicator of involvement with the Minority Male Success Initiative.

Pursuit of Higher Education

One of the major themes from the study's findings indicates the influence of familial support on the decision to pursue higher education for the participants. Participants shared that in some way, parental influence and the desire for a better life led them to deciding DCC was right next step. Shawn shared,

> Well, for starters, I don't know if I was college material, so I was like let me come to Pitt for two years to see where I would be after I graduated high school. Because that's a milestone for my family and my generation, because my mom never graduated high school, nor my dad." Shawn shared that he did have a younger sister who was currently in high school and that he was the first person in his immediate family to graduate with a high school diploma.

Shawn added,

> Well, after you graduate high school, there's not a lot of jobs for you to do. If you don't go to college and you just have a high school diploma, it's not really going to take you to a lot of places. Let me get an Associate's degree. This is what I'm going to do with that for a job.

Felix also shared how his family was a driving force in pursuing higher education. Felix credited his mother in leading his decision, sharing,

> According to my mom, she forced me to do it. I could have swore when they was interviewing us at school, me, in my brain, I heard, "If you come here, you get a free computer." And that's what I thought it was at first. I was like, "Oh, if I come here, I get a free computer? Oh, perfect. Let's go here.

When deciding to choose Dream Community College, Felix highlighted the significance of an early college program as a determining factor, explaining.

> ..basically the early college, it would've helped me get an associate's degree and my high school degree. So, it would help me out in the long run and save me a little bit of money when it's time to go to college.

Cody, having two parents with college degrees served as inspiration but also access to dual enrollment programs played a determining factor in pursuing higher education. Cody explained,

> The real reason why I decided that I wanted to come to Dream Community College is because I had already started my dual enrollment class while I was in high school. Since Dream Community College was one of the only programs locally that offered the CCP that I could take because I didn't qualify for the early college high schools. And because Dream Community College's scholarship gave me a full ride and because of how close it was to home that I would not have to acquire my own vehicle and living expenses in order to go live off site somewhere in another county that was one of the main reasons for me picking Dream Community College.

For the nontraditional participants of the study, Swift and John, pursuing higher education at DCC originated from previous attempts at being student and reentering higher education through DCC. Swift is from the local area near Dream Community College but started his educational journey at a 4-year university in North Carolina. After leaving that university to work full time, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and starting his own business, let Swift to DCC to learn more about entrepreneurship. Swift shared,

> I am originally from Cloud Town (pseudonym). I moved away in 2010, moved to Charlotte to go to UNC Charlotte, and I went there for 4 years and then I just didn't finish for whatever reason. I started working in corporate America and doing things and bills came and so I started making money. I stayed in Charlotte about 12 years and then my father passed. And so I said, "Let me move back home, be closer to family, be closer to my mother." And so that has now been three, maybe 4 years this year.

Swift continued,

> But it didn't necessarily give me the terminology to know how to go from just working out of a business out of your vehicle to having something that was actually official and established. So I started doing some more research to figure out where I could gain that knowledge. And that's when I came across the idea that Dream Community... I actually started with Dream Community in their little small business center that they have, which is, I guess, free to business owners in the community. I started there and I realized that it was real superficial, top-surface stuff. You needed to already have some understanding. One of the advisors and counselors told me that they had an entrepreneurship program that was fairly new, but it was pretty good. And so that was the first time that I'd heard

> that you could actually go to school for something like that, aside from majoring in business management or something like that.

Global Pandemic Shaping Academic Journey

Another major finding from the semistructured interviews with the seven (7) participants outlined how the global pandemic shaped their respective academic journeys. The finding indicated the global pandemic met each participant at various moments in their lives and ultimately created opportunities to start a new path or improve existing academic outcomes.

For Felix and some participants, the pandemic brought challenges and barriers to success. Felix stated, “My first few years here, freshman year, COVID hit. So, I didn't really do nothing. Sophomore year, online. So, didn't really experience anything here.”

Felix continued,

> I can honestly say that when COVID started, I was slacking off a lot. When I first got here, I believe my average for the college side was a 4.0, a 3.0 or something. But then after COVID, those grades just dropped to a two-point-something, I believe. It's a little bit of not being in-person, and then my laziness. Because I wasn't in class, and there was nobody to hold me accountable except for myself.

Shawn shared similar experiences during the pandemic related to academic performance. Shawn explained,

> Yeah, it was definitely hard because we're supposed to do online. And Zoom, it was okay, but in some areas it was just like I can't do this. Definitely, the pandemic really changed a lot of things, considering from face-to-face to online. I wasn't really a strong online person because I was more face to face because I needed someone to show me step-by-step how to do this and how to do that.

Shawn elaborated on the impact of the pandemic once in-person instruction resumed. Shawn stated,

> I felt like I did more and accomplished things after COVID because before COVID, I was still in high school when it happened, and after COVID we got back into high school. And I think that's where things just starting to get a little easier because we got to do something different. And COVID really changed a lot of things. It's probably going to be in history about this, about us in the future, but after COVID, everything just got easier, it's just a better understanding after everything.

George expressed a similar experience as Felix and Shawn, stating,

> When the pandemic came in March 2020, I was taking all in-person classes. And once the pandemic came I had to switch from in-person to all online. And it was difficult because I'm more of an in-person learner. So online it's a little bit of a struggle.

Although three participants, Felix, Shawn, and George expressed the challenges they faced adjusting to moving the academic environment to an online setting, other participants shared how the pandemic provided an opportunity to further their education.

Swift shared how at the start of the pandemic; he was not enrolled in any courses. Due to the global pandemic, Swift created a cleaning business. He stated,

> I started doing a little bit of research because in moving home, I didn't want it to just be me going back to get another job to pay bills and let time pass. And so I started doing some research and realized that Cloud Town [Pseudonym] was kind of the small business mecca. If you wanted to open something, this was the place, you moved here. And then you could very easily take it and move it somewhere else or you could stay here and just be successful. And so I moved here, I quit my job.

Swift added,

> So I started doing some more research to figure out where I could gain that knowledge. And that's when I came across the idea that Dream Community College... I actually started with Dream Community College in their little small business center that they have, which is, I guess, free to business owners in the community. One of the advisors and counselors told me that they had an entrepreneurship program that was fairly new, but it was pretty good. And so that was the first time that I'd heard that you could actually go to school for something like that, aside from majoring in business management or something like that. Now I'm six months in, first semester done. It's been very beneficial."

John echoed the same sentiment that the pandemic presented an opportunity to further his education. John stated,

> Well, COVID was one of the main reasons why I got back into school because when they did the Heroes package for the COVID, he had a provision in there for veterans that veterans was dislocated because of the pandemic or whatever like that. That was my opportunity to get back in school. And that was God's way to give me a chance to get back. I wanted that challenge. I would do self-reading. I'm also a disabled vet too.

Carlton provided an in-depth perspective on how he utilized the global pandemic for improvement while not being deterred by the pandemic's impact on society. Carlton shared,

> Honestly, as far as COVID for me as a person, I feel it has helped me as a person because when they know everybody being quarantined, you couldn't really get out as much. Allowed me to spend more time being home even though it kind of drove me crazy. But I was more to workout by myself, I can do this. I was actually able to gain weight for

> football. And then as far as school went, honestly some of the classes I experienced while in high school and in college kind of made things a little easier.

Carlton added,

> I was able better plan out my days and do what work, what I can do and cannot do by this certain time period. And so it actually made high school kind of go by with a breeze. And then freshman year of college kind of went by pretty fast as well with some classes that were face to face. But you had to use electronics because there were still some restrictions that you couldn't do. And so basically with... I'm now, not to say COVID was the best thing that could have happened, but it definitely has had a positive impact as far as my future-wise going, versus the present materialistic things wasn't as good because there's still things, I didn't get to experience because of COVID, but it also kind of balanced out, if that makes sense.

Experience of Authentic Support and Care from Faculty and Staff

Another major finding about the experience of men of color who participate in the Minority Male Success Initiative at Dream Community College is that the participants articulated the support structures and influence that faculty and staff at Dream Community College have on their lives and educational journeys.

Felix explained how the consistent accountability and support from staff members at Dream Community College impacted his experience. Felix stated when asked about interactions with faculty and staff at Dream Community College,

> We have career fairs and such. You can just go meet some random ... Not random people, but some people in the community that could help you out in the future. And then Fisher [Pseudonym], he was our first speaker. I met him. Every time he sees me on-campus

now, he's like, "Have you thought about what you're going to do in the future now?" And just trying to make sure I'm not slacking off.

When asked about a meaningful experience at Dream Community College, Cody stated,

> The most meaningful experience that I've had is the opportunity for me to connect with both peers and instructors. I've had significantly a positive experience with my instructors and my peers at school, particularly the instructors because you could get some instructors that are not particularly willing to help you learn specifically. And then there are the instructors that are kind of middle of the road, but my instructors have actually been pretty exceptional on the front of being proactive and willing to help me with everything.

Cody explained that instructors and professors at DCC are committed to student success. Cody shared,

> The main thing that I would say is just knowing that somebody has my back, the encouragement to keep going with my education and just never stop with it. Never stop doing my education. That's how a lot of my instructors are. They just want me and the other students to be successful, to be able to get them to achieve higher. And they want us to aim higher, higher because they know that we can do better and achieve higher.

For Swift, an academic advisor recommended the entrepreneurship program and introduced the idea of joining the program to ultimately help with his business. Swift also spoke about another DCC professor, stating,

> One of my professors, she's so down-to-earth and she's very inspiring. As a matter of fact, I told her last week, I think. I was like, "I'm glad that I had you as my first professor back in school because you really took the edge off of the idea that everybody's going to be

> tough, it's going to be difficult. Everything's been moving so fast, it's going to be too far in front of me and I'm going to be playing catch up in so many different avenues.

For other participants, having men of color and staff connected to the Minority Male Success Initiative as mentors and role models has been impactful. George shared the following,

> I've found Mr. Fisher [pseudonym], Mr. Mitchell [pseudonym], and some of the other advisors to be helpful. If I were to ever need anything, I feel I could reach out to them. And if they didn't know, they could try to find the right person to point me to in a direction.

Carlton echoed the same sentiments in regard to having faculty and staff support his goals but also provide tools and information that could impact his future. Carlton gave an in-depth perspective on his relationship with one DCC staff member. Carlton explained,

> And so what Chris [Pseudonym] really did was kind of pinpoint the certain things that we're good at and how we could use it in the real world. And I feel like each time that he did that for us, I felt connected to him because I knew that he was someone that you can actually go to and he can give you helpful information, he'll sit down with you and help you get through the steps to help you plan out what you want to do, your careers and everything.

During a visit to Dream Community College to observe a MMSI program, the support and authentic sense of care was evident in the observed interactions between participants and other students who were in attendance with DCC faculty and staff who were also present and facilitated the program. Specifically, I observed Mr. Fisher [pseudonym] who was identified by Felix, George, Shawn, and Carlton as someone who has their best interests at heart, connect with students in a genuine way. Mr. Fisher knew nearly every student who walked down the hallway

into the meeting room by name and asked nearly every student about how they were doing and encouraged them to attend the program.

Student Status as an Indicator of MMSI Involvement

Dream Community College's MMSI structure permits involvement connected to the various ways men of color are enrolled at the college. For example, MMSI facilitates programming for early college male students as well as dually enrolled students. This allows high school students to learn and participate in MMSI programming early who can later continue their participation with MMSI when fully enrolled or attend Dream Community College. Data analysis of participant interviews reveal participants learn about MMSI offerings informally.

When asked about his experience with MMSI, Felix shared the following,

> So one day I had a little bit of time in-between the gym, and I was ... In-between classes. My fault. And I was going to the gym, and they were set up outside of it, handing out flyers and such. That's how I found out about it.

Felix continued that prior to this interaction, he stayed "on the early college side of campus, not the main campus side." When asked about what led him to continue and participate, Felix shared

> Again, at first I was just trying to go to the gym, and I said all right, all right. I'll come back right after this. And I really hadn't planned to, but since I had already said it, I said I might as well try and keep my word and go see what was up.

Cody echoed a similar experience as Felix as to how he was introduced to MMSI at Dream Community College. Cody explained,

> I learned about it [MMSI] from some of the ads at the events that I had gone out, and that's how I ended up signing up for it and getting in because I had heard that they were

> going to do it. I decided to go, I signed up, I filled out the information when it was time for me to fill out the email information. And that's how I found out about being able to go into that.

Cody further explained,

> The main thing that made me say that I wanted to do this is because I just felt like I needed to go, just to experience it. I felt like it would be fun. And at the same time in the back of my head I was thinking... I mean it's just like TRIO…it's another thing that could help me.

Swift, who is a nontraditional student who did not participate in the dual enrollment or early college program stated the following regarding how he learned of MMSI, "He [Mr. Fisher] and I talked about it, but yes, that's the only way. I saw the flyer, it was pretty detailed, but no, I didn't even go online or do anything like that."

Carlton also expressed learning about MMSI through one of his course instructors. Carlton articulated the following regarding how he learned of MMSI and why he decided to participate,

> I remember Mr. Chris had sent me an email asking if I wanted to be a part of it because they wanted their viewpoint on students of color and what their viewpoints or how they feel at a community college.

Research Question 2: What programmatic efforts do men of color participating in MMSI programs believe contribute to their success and persistence?

Analyzing interview transcripts as well as conducting a program observation provided data which the researcher used to answer the Research Question 2 of the study. Specifically, the researcher sought to explore and understand how participants believe their participation in

campus programming and MMSI programming facilitates and contributes to goal achievement, personal development, and community and relationship building. From the data analysis, two major findings emerged including (1) programs that focus on personal growth and financial literacy stand out to participants and (2) programmatic efforts focused on navigating society and the college experience as a man of color generate the greatest interest and participation.

Programming that Supports Personal Growth and Financial Literacy

Many participants expressed the overall goal of finding a career upon obtaining their associate and bachelor's degrees that will provide financial stability. Participants shared going to Dream Community College was in part because of the cost and the ability to lessen the financial burden upon completion or transferring to a 4-year university.

Felix shared the following when asked about what programmatic efforts he connected the most to since being involved with MMSI,

> The first one is the Minority Male one, because we had one lecture about chasing a bag. And that one in particular, it really helped me out. The Secure the Bag event, and there was one about entrepreneurship. At the time, my GPA was like a two-point-something. Still recovering a little bit. But during the Secure the Bag event, the speaker ... I think his name was John or something. But basically he was like, "Focus on money. The girls and stuff, they can come later.

Felix continued on the importance of financial stability, sharing, "my mom, she's still trying to help get me through school. So basically, I just wanted to be able to support myself and not have to struggle like I seen her do when I was younger." For Felix, his expectation for finishing his degree is directly related to the ability to provide for his family, his own security, and to alleviate the financial burden of his mother. For Felix, he explained that he chose to attend

DCC because of their early college program. The early college program would allow Felix to complete his high school degree as well as an associate's degree while simultaneously saving money. As Felix shared in reference to why he chose DCC, "So, it would help me out in the long run and save me a little bit of money when it's time to go to college."

Another programmatic theme that emerged from the data focused on goal setting and professional development. The researcher observed a program held at Dream Community College where two DCC staff members presented on resume building, career exploration, and interview preparation. The two DCC staff members' message was about how to be successful through the job searching process. There were approximately ten male students in attendance including three who were participants in the study, Cody, Swift, and George. I would describe the setting as informal but informative. After the meeting, I conversed with a program attendee to learn more about his story and potentially recruit him to be a participant of the study. I learned from the young man that he happened to be on campus at that time and joined the program spontaneously because he saw a group of men, primarily black men, meeting together. The individual shared that he happened to be on campus at the time because he wanted to enroll in courses and change the trajectory of his life.

Participants also shared how attending a program about setting goals and creating a vision was helpful and stood out among other programs. When asked about programming which contributed the most to his success while being at DCC, George offered the following,

> The first one we had for 2023, back in January, creating a vision board. We created a vision board and cut out and glued items to describe our goals for 2023. So we have a visual of it instead of just talking about it.

Felix who also attended the vision board program shared,

> As for the success and stuff, at the beginning of this semester, in January, so the meeting for them, it was a vision board thing. So, they were telling us to shoot ... Not shoot for stars, but basically do the best we could and planning our vision. We had people talking about wanting to do a job, like somebody trying to be a court justice. Me, it was trying to get my first car and such. But yeah, basically putting everything we wanted to do out onto a piece of cardboard so we can visualize it. And every time we see it, we got to be reminded of it. Because if we forget, we're likely to fall off of that path.

When speaking about MMSI programmatic efforts and campus engagement, participants also expressed their desires and expectations for future programming. George expressed the desire for more programming throughout the year and that he wished to have participated earlier. George stated, "I would say maybe more the forums they have now, where they have different topics like counseling, career aspiration. I kind of wish I would've did that at the beginning instead of towards at the end." For other participants, scheduling conflicts and other family obligations limited involvement. Swift recalled seeing publicity for MMSI programs and initially believed the programs were targeted for younger students. Swift stated,

> When I looked at the flyer, I saw a bunch of young people. And so I had just assumed that it was not necessarily for younger people, but the whole entire mentality and level of conversation would be more so geared towards younger people.

When asked what could draw him to more programming, Swift who is 30 years old stated, "if it was something that, off the gate, I knew catered to nontraditional students."

Carlton shared how time constraints limited his participation as well,

> I had workouts at a certain time, and I was also playing football on our pro team. So we would have practice on certain days, mainly on the weekends. But those workouts would

> be practically Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. And so now, those events will fall under those days. And the way it was set up, I wouldn't have no time to stay there fully and really get that full experience.

Carlton continued, “if I had the time and it worked with my schedule, then yeah I would attend more workshops or events that are held for men of color.”

Programming That Centers Navigating Campus and Society as a Man of Color

Another major theme associated with Research Question 2 involves participants identifying programmatic efforts that focus on navigating campus and society as a man of color as being impactful and necessary for success. When asked about a memorable program that he attended, Cody recalled attending a program where the emphasis was on how to be successful as a man of color on campus. Cody stated that the program was a discussion about the challenges men of color face in society. When asked about future programming and programs that would interest him, Cody reflected on his experience with the police. He offered the following suggestion that he thought would be beneficial for men of color at DCC,

> One of the biggest challenges in minority male society is in interactions with police. One of the ideas that comes to mind is getting maybe the Dream City Police Department or the Sheriff's Department together with the club [MMSI] and just pairing up officers and students to do fun activities or do a meal together or something together where we can just interact, hang out with some of the officers.

For other participants like George, MMSI and campus programming provided the opportunity to connect with other men of color. For students like George, campus involvement such as MMSI may be one of few opportunities to connect with other men of color. George

shared that he grew up in a household with only women, his mother and sisters. When speaking about DCC and MMSI, George stated,

> Because typically for me, I've grown up in an all woman environment by my mother and other female relatives, and that's all I've known my entire life. Once I got involved into MMSI, it was different, and it gave me a different exposure.

George continued, “it has taught me to bond with men a little bit more. So I'm not just solely around women all the time, it's kind of like a healthy balance.”

Carlton reflected on attending a program where the discussion around race and campus climate were the subjects. Carlton explained how DCC administrators and staff who were present wanted to know how students of color felt related to their safety on campus. Although Carlton offered that he felt safe at DCC, he also explained his expectations for enrolling at DCC and the perceptions others may have of him being a man of color. Carlton stated,

> So as far as since I started as being a freshman to me being a sophomore now, throughout these years at Dream, I would say as far as my first time being in college in 2 years, it's... The thought I had of college when coming out of high school wasn't as high as I thought. I thought I guess because maybe because it was a community college, not your typical universities that you would see in movies, at least my perspective. But as far as the many opportunities, the kind of help you can get, that actually exceeded my expectations and how much help you can have, especially being a male of color. Because I didn't think, me being a male of color, honestly, I didn't think I would get much help. I just thought I had to get the information by just listening in and going in with my own knowledge.

Carlton continued,

> But now as far as me being a male of color itself and my frame as far as how I'm physically built, I get it's in college, you got people who got different viewpoints, crack jokes and stuff like that. And it's all fine and dandy. Well, it's not fine and dandy, but it's more of, there's just some things that are best not to be said, even if you don't mean it in that way. Because if I were to retaliate, if you looked at me as a male of color, I'm six foot six, one, weighing at 230 pounds of mainly muscle. So you see a guy like me, you would think that I'm a threat when I'm not. But at the same time, if I were to retaliate in an aggressive way, now I'm a threat and people are fearful and the whole thing of what we already face now in society is coming to life.

Overall, participants are utilizing programming through MMSI to connect with other men of color. Through my observation of being on DCC's campus, the men of color present for the event demonstrated camaraderie as it was apparent that relationships had already been established. Furthermore, participants are seeking programming that centers their existence as men of color and how to safely navigate campus.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a description of the findings based on data collected and analyzed to answer the research questions. From transcribed interviews, the researcher was able to identify major findings of the study including participants' pursuit of higher education, the impact of COVID-19 on the academic journey for each participant, the value participants place on their interactions with faculty and staff, and how their student experience influencing how they become aware of and engage the Minority Male Success Initiative at Dream Community College. Additionally, the researcher was able to identify findings within the data that participants found Minority Male Success Initiative programming to be engaging, meaningful,

and purposeful. Participants identified programming that provided tangible life skills, such as financial literacy to be valuable. Lastly, some participants described the value of having programs that centers how to navigate Dream Community College and society as a man of color. The following chapter will provide a discussion on the study's findings as well as explain implications for future practices and research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine the experiences of minority males participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI) at Dream Community College. The researcher explored how seven (7) participants perceive their engagement in MMSI programmatic efforts on their overall success (e.g., persistence, graduation, grades). A case study research design was used to gather data to answer the research questions. Semistructured interviews were conducted with seven (7) Black males who completed at least one semester of courses at Dream Community College, participated in at least one (1) MMSI sponsored program or meeting, and identified as being a man of color. The participants were diverse based on age, program of study, and intended purpose for being at Dream Community College. Some participants attended Dream Community College in order to transfer to a 4-year university and other participants' goals included earning their associate's degree and immediately entering the workforce. Some participants were enrolled at Dream Community College to gain knowledge that would directly benefit them and their own business. Participants range in age from 20 to 45 years old and some disclosed being diagnosed with Autism.

As the researcher, my goal was to center the voices of the students and to hear about their experiences at Dream Community College, participation in a MMSI programs, and how those two contribute to their perception of their overall success as they defined it. For the study, the following research questions were answered using the data analysis described and explained in Chapter 4:

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of minority males participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative?

Research Question 2: What programmatic efforts do minority males participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative believe contribute to their success and persistence?

This chapter will include a discussion and interpretations of the research findings from Chapter 4. Additionally, this chapter will include implications related to the research findings and recommendations for future research and practice. The discussion will start with the application of the findings to the S-E-O model framework.

S-E-O Model Framework Application

For this research study, the researcher utilized Wood and Harris' (2016) socioecological outcomes (S-E-O) model as a theoretical framework and roadmap. According to Harris and Wood (2016), the S-E-O model is used to describe the factors that influence success outcomes for men of color by identifying the intersections of societal, environmental, and intrapersonal factors. It is important to note that the S-E-O Model focused primarily on the experiences of Black males which comprised all of the participants of the study. All seven (7) participants identified as Black. The researcher attempted to recruit participants who may identify as Latino/Latinx, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Asian but was unsuccessful. The seven (7) participants, all Black males, did present diversity across other demographics, such as age, major, veteran status, marital status.

The first two constructs of the S-E-O model describe the factors and experiences for men of color prior to entering higher education, specifically entry into community college. As Wood and Harris (2016) state, "these factors influence success…and educators have little control over them." For all the participants in the study, these men are all bringing their life experiences, self-perceptions, intersectionality of identities with them to Dream Community College. For John, he was the oldest participant in the study at 45 years old and also a military veteran serving multiple

years prior to being medically discharged. John explained the challenges of acclimating to being a student and adult learner after serving in the military, raising children who are adults now, and working full-time. For Shawn, Cody, and George, having support services on campus was paramount as these three participants talked about the significance of a disability resource office for their Individualized Education Plans (IEP). For other participants such as Carlton and Felix who both explained their hardships growing up and not wanting to experience the same financial struggles and instability of their parents, these are the "inputs" for which these men and students are entering higher education. As Wood and Harris (2016) articulated, if community colleges fail to notice and acknowledge the "inputs" and background factors of men of color entering their institutions, student success outcomes are negatively impacted. In addition to background factors, societal factors such as negative stereotypes and messaging for men of color entering higher education play a role in Black men determining self-worth and their ability to succeed during postsecondary education (Wood and Harris, 2016). This "input" was evident during my interview with Shawn who stated within the first 5 minutes that he did not believe he was "college material." When asked what that meant specifically, Shawn continued by sharing that neither of his parents finished high school and he was unsure of his ability to handle college level work after high school. Going to Dream Community College provided not only the opportunity to earn a degree but provided a space where Shawn could realize his potential. In these cases, self-efficacy was a clear input.

The socioecological domains, which are the four boxes in the middle of the S-E-O model diagram, noncognitive domain, academic domain, environmental domain, and campus ethos domain (see Figure 1), can be seen in both research questions of the study. As Wood and Harris (2016) explain, these four domains *account for the experiences* of men of color as they navigate

their educational journey at a community college. For the seven (7) participants of the study, each participant provided examples from their experiences at Dream Community College which could be found in the four socioecological domains–noncognitive, academic, environmental, and campus ethos.

The noncognitive domain was used to view how student success outcomes are shaped in part by a student's belief they can succeed while in college (Wood and Harris, 2016). These beliefs could be characterized by self-efficacy, self-assuredness, and confidence. For the seven (7) participants of the study, this was evident by their articulation of why they chose to attend Dream Community College and the value they placed on earning their degrees. According to the S-E-O model, this would fall under the noncognitive domain under the utility of the degree. The noncognitive domain is also represented through the lens of identity development. Specifically, previous research has indicated that Black males who based their self-worth from the acquisition of material and financial means often experience negative success outcomes while attending community colleges (Wood, Essien-Wood, 2012). For Felix, this was highlighted through his stated goal of acquiring a Hellcat car. The car is seen as a symbol of wealth, "making it," or even symbolic of a lifestyle that is totally opposite of his current experience where he describes his mother as struggling to raise him and his sister.

The academic domain, which focuses on interaction with faculty and staff, commitment to studying, and utilizing campus academic services was highly represented throughout the findings of the study and the experiences of the participants. Each participant could identify multiple faculty and staff members who have been integral in their experiences at Dream Community College. Participants would describe these individuals as not only campus employees, but more as extended family members. Participants viewed these relationships and

connections to be authentic and caring. Participants would articulate specific interactions and conversations which left lasting impressions and meaningful support. Nearly all of the participants identified tutoring support and resources as being critical for adjusting and adapting to the rigor of college work. Additionally, participants did not express apprehension about utilizing campus resources such as tutoring on campus but recognized their needs.

The environmental domain is seen in the stressful and unexpected life events, outside of academic work commitments, and family responsibilities. Outside work commitments were in the stories of many of the participants of the study. Nearly all of the study's participants hold outside jobs. For Swift, he runs his own cleaning business where he currently has three employees. Participants describe the impact of their "validating agents" on their experience navigating being a student. All participants described the support received from family on their current journeys. For some participants like Cody and Shawn, they rely on family for transportation to and from Dream Community College as an example. Contrary to John's experience, who is much older and has transportation means, it is in other ways the College supports his success as an internal validating agent. John shared that a scholarship for $500 went a long way for him and provided financial relief and less stress that could present barriers and challenges to his success.

Campus ethos is a domain which involves the overall operations of the College and the policies and programs which shapes the student experience (Wood and Harris, 2016). The campus culture and institutional leadership should provide the space and environment where students can succeed. This comes in the form of such as programs, services, and resources that produce a campus environment that is welcoming for all students. All participants of the study articulated an overall positive experience at Dream Community College. Carlton expressed his

appreciation for DCC's leader and President who joined a campus discussion on campus climate and the experience of students of color in the wake of many racial events over the past years including but not limited to the murders of Black men by law enforcement and the racial climate and polarization of our current society.

As a result of the interaction between the four construct domains and the background factors Black males bring with them to community colleges, success outcomes such as persistence and degree attainment can be achieved.

Wood and Harris (2016) also describe the intersections that also impact student success outcomes. Wood and Harris note the distinct interactions between domains in the model as follows: (a) campus ethos and academic domains, (b) campus ethos and noncognitive domains, (c), environmental and noncognitive domains, (d), environmental and academic domains, and (e) academic and noncognitive domains.

Participants described their experiences at Dream Community College through the intersectionality of the domains listed above. Through these intersections, participants described how their involvement in MMSI programming contributed to their success outcomes, which includes success outcomes as described in the S-E-O model but also their personal definitions of success.

Discussion

The findings from the study suggest that men of color who participate in the Minority Male Success Initiative tie their perceptions of success to the ability to achieve their individual goals in order to live a desirable life. Participants of the study all indicated family influence in pursuing higher education and the value placed on succeeding personally and academically. The results of the study support research (Brooms, 2019; Bush, E. C., & Bush, L., 2010; Wood &

Harris, 2016) that the entry point into higher education for men of color, in particular Black males, is through community colleges. Only one participant, Swift, indicated their academic journey began at a 4-year institution. Swift also shared how he did not complete a 4-year degree and found the community college space more aligned with the ability to achieve his personal goals. All participants shared the significance of staying in their communities to attend DCC due to its proximity to stay close to home and its affordability. As a result, community colleges must recognize the untapped potential within the communities they are situated and serving. Community colleges, such as Dream Community College, should develop robust recruitment and marketing strategies aimed at vulnerable populations such as men of color. Additionally, community colleges should review its funding model and identify scholarships and financial assistance for men of color who experience financial barriers to enrollment.

The findings of the study also suggest the important role college faculty and staff play in the success of men of color. The participants of the study all indicated and recognized the support they received from DCC faculty and staff contributes to their success. Participants of the study could all identify multiple faculty members, advisors, MMSI staff who in some capacity provided information, resources, and encouragement to achieve their goals. Participants of the study found DCC faculty and staff to genuinely care about their well-being and success. During an observation of one MMSI program, I observed two men of color staff members who demonstrated their support for some of the study's participants and other men of color present in which participants described in their individual interviews. These men of color were engaged in the program and with the students, demonstrated they knew the students on a personal level, and held the students accountable by asking about due dates for upcoming assignments. Community college faculty and staff should demonstrate a vested interest in making meaningful relationships

with men of color, understanding their stories and life experiences that make each person unique. Being present, available, and visible as a faculty and staff member could lead to more sustainable relationships being built with men of color.

The findings of the study also suggest that COVID-19 provided some participants with the opportunity for a pivot while creating barriers for others. Although society sharply changed during the onset of COVID-19, there was no singular or universal impact. For participants, John and Swift, COVID-19 brought them to Dream Community College as they were looking for the next opportunity to achieve their goals and improve their livelihoods. For the remaining participants who were already enrolled at Dream Community College, COVID-19 presented some with challenges adjusting to an online environment. These challenges included not having access or face to face instruction which is more conducive for learning especially for students who identified having a learning disability or being diagnosed with Autism. Participants described the challenges of limited access to learning resources such as tutoring or unexpected adjustments to IEPs while Dream Community College adjusted to COVID-19. Lastly, the findings of the study suggest that the global pandemic provided participants the opportunity for reflection on where they were on their individual journeys and a space to make changes to feel more fulfilled.

The findings of the study suggest that participants learn about MMSI programming informally. Participants shared about learning about programs through emails and posters posted on campus. Additionally, participants learned about MMSI through their academic advisors and faculty members who believed involvement with the programs and services would be beneficial to the student. From the findings of the study, participants' involvement with MMSI programming can be tied to their commitment and knowledge of such resources on campus.

Nearly half of the participants of the study participated in early college programs connected to Dream Community College. Through the early college program, men of color have the opportunity to participate in MMSI sponsored programming. This early involvement established a connection and pipeline to continued participation once a student is no longer in the early college program and full time at Dream Community College. As a result of continued participation in MMSI programming, men of color would benefit from faculty and staff relationships, established relationships with other men of color, and awareness of campus resources. Additionally, other departments of the college should utilize the early college program to spread awareness and promote campus services and resources that support student success outcomes.

The findings of the study indicate that programmatic efforts provide participants tangible skills that will contribute to their success and completion at Dream Community College but also extend beyond their time as a student. These skills include preparation for job interviews and financial literacy. Participants also found their participation in MMSI programming and other campus programs create an environment for brotherhood and connection to other men of color. For one participant, George, he found involvement with MMSI programming was paramount in developing relationships with other men of color as he grew up as the only male in his family. Initiatives and programs through MMSI provide the space for men of color to talk about the issues impacting their lives, their fears, and goals. Findings from the study suggest that programmatic efforts that center on campus culture create opportunities to address how welcome men of color feel navigating campus. Participants also indicated engagement in other campus programs and organizations such as honor societies and TRiO programs also contributed to their success. Campus administrators with oversight of programmatic areas such as MMSI or the

Student Government Association for example, could use the long term outcomes men of color receive from their participation to market these programs to other students.

Implications

The findings of the study aligned with previous research discussed and explored in Chapter 2 on the experiences of community college men of color students and were applied to the S-E-O model. Furthermore, the findings of this study add to the minimal research currently available on the NCCCS Minority Male Success Initiative. As explained in Chapter 1, the Minority Male Success Initiative originated from the 3MP program as a means to address graduation and retention rates for minority men in North Carolina (North Carolina Community Colleges, 2013). When considering the Minority Male Success Initiative program as a whole from the NCCCS, this study intended to center the voices of men of color who are participating in MMSI programming at one NC community college. Participants of the study were asked what led to their decision to attend Dream Community College and pursue higher education. Overwhelmingly, participants shared that the accessibility to Dream Community College and its affordability were leading factors. Participants also revealed family support and influence in pursuing higher education. These findings are consistent with many researchers (Brooms, 2019; Bush & Bush, 2010; Dizon, Huerta, Nguyen, Romero-Morales, Salazar, 2021; Wood, J.L. & Williams, 2013) and studies on the Black male experience at community colleges. Specifically, the findings of this study align with research (Brooms, 2019; Flowers, 2006; Wood and Harris, 2016) that indicates that community colleges are the leading entry point for men of color in higher education. Furthermore, getting men of color through the door requires institutions to not settle on simply enrollment numbers but implementing programs and providing resources that promote success among this population (Bensimon, Falcon, V, Felix, Harris III, Mercado,

Monge, Wood, J. L., 2017). Additionally, community colleges must evaluate the recruitment techniques that target men of color in order to address enrollment trends related to this population.

The study revealed the undeniable impact of the global pandemic on higher education institutions and men of color. Previous research indicates that students were adversely affected by COVID-19 due to the unprecedented shifts in academic instruction, social relationships, and day-to-day life (Browning et al., 2021). Furthermore, Browning MHEM et. al (2021) conducted a study on the psychological impact of COVID-19 on college students revealing heightened levels of stress and anxiety due to the sudden movement to online instruction. Findings from the study build upon such research on the impact of COVID-19. Participants of this study all shared stories of how COVID-19 impacted their academic journeys. Compared to previous studies (Briones, Jones, Latimer, Leath, Lawson, 2022) on the impact of COVID-19 on college students, the findings of this study align based on the true experiences shared during the interview process. Half of the study's participants identified challenges adjusting to the online learning environment which negatively impacted their academic performance and grade point averages. Results from previous studies revealed that students reported lower levels of motivation while reporting increased feelings of depression and anxiety. Data from this study reflect previous research as students of the study reported similar feelings, specifically slacking off on work with less accountability than being face-to-face with a professor or instructor. Although previous research (Browning et al., 2021) underscores the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the student experience, data from this study also provide positive experiences for students who found the pandemic as an opportunity to enter community college to improve their livelihoods. As a result, community colleges should continue to monitor and evaluate practices and policies since

returning to campus post COVID-19. Based on the reported impacts of COVID-19 on the student experience, community colleges including Dream Community College should be cautious of reverting to pre-COVID-19 operations as doing so can be perceived as a lack of care which can stifle student success. Broadly, colleges and universities should be considerate of the implications of COVID-19 for transfer students and eventually students who may pursue graduate or professional degrees.

As stated in Chapter 2, researchers such as Wood (2019) and Bauer (2014) have conducted prior research on the impact of faculty validation on the experiences of men of color. Additionally, studies have found (Bauer, 2014; Card & Wood, 2019; Wood & Newman, 2017) that faculty validation fosters success among men of color. Men of this study spoke about the influence of faculty and staff on their success. Specifically, participants described feeling supported by DCC faculty and staff personally and academically. These findings are consistent with prior research on student-faculty engagement. Prior research on student-faculty engagement revealed that student-faculty engagement can be a predictor of student success outcomes, including but increased motivation to succeed academically (Bhattacharya, Komarraju, Musulkin, 2010). Evidenced through the study's findings, one participant Cody, stated,

> I've had significantly of a positive experience with my instructors and my peers at school, particularly the instructors because you could get some instructors that are not particularly willing to help you learn specifically. And then there are the instructors that are kind of middle of the road, but my instructors have actually been pretty exceptional on the front of being proactive and willing to help me with everything.

Another participant, Felix, quipped that he appreciated Mr. Fisher for his support and "making sure he wasn't slacking off." As evidenced through the findings of the study, men of color at Dream Community College found informal interactions with instructors and staff to be factors influencing their success. For Dream Community College men of color to perform well in the classroom and ultimately get across the finish line for completion, Dream Community College faculty and staff must demonstrate a commitment to forging positive relationships with this population.

Lastly, the results of this study should be considered when community colleges are examining the racial climate of their campuses. Participants of the study identified programming efforts that provided the space to discuss the challenges facing men of color and how to best navigate campus and society. Campus climate and the sense of belonging are critical factors in the success of men of color. By addressing the campus climate through intentional programming, strategic planning, and prioritizing understanding the plight of men of color, community college leaders can better position themselves to best serve this population in order to increase persistence and completion rates.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The following section outlines recommendations for future practice pertaining to initiative programs intended to support men of color students.

Recommendation 1 - Statewide MMSI Initiatives/Conference for Men of Color

An important component of the Minority Male Success Initiative is to create opportunities for men of color to build relationships with each other for creating community. Creating community and opportunities for connection for men of color can only enhance the student experience while positively influencing student success outcomes. With respect to the

functionality of MMSI across the state of North Carolina, institutions receiving the MMSI grant funds are seemingly operating in silos with minimal collaborations across programs. By collaborating with other community colleges across the state, the NCCCS should explore opportunities to host a statewide MMSI program or summit for men of color which includes various programming topics that promote student success while creating community among students.

Recommendation 2 - Develop Formal Mentoring Programs

Another recommendation for practice is for the creation and implementation of a formal mentoring program for men of color. Research has shown that mentoring programs can be a factor that promote student success. Furthermore, black males and men of color initiative programs typically incorporate some form of mentoring in their operations and implementation. Previous research indicates that mentoring programs can increase connectedness to the campus and strengthen relationships between students and faculty (Brown, Gibson, Marion Carley, Ray, 2014). Given the connection to adding to the workforce, community colleges like DCC can position themselves to better situate students postcompletion to the local workforce by encouraging industry partners to become mentors for men of color. Additionally, based on the findings of the study, participants found DCC faculty and staff to be supportive and partners in their success. Moving forward, community colleges have the opportunity to cultivate the student-faculty relationship by identifying faculty members who want to serve as mentors. Developing a mentoring program would require clear expectations to define roles and responsibilities as well as securing individuals who would be committed to serving.

Recommendation 3 - Evaluate and collaborate with campus programming efforts to provide support for men of color

During an observation of a MMSI sponsored program by the researcher, one of the program facilitators indicated the need for more collaboration between departments and functional areas to eliminate duplication. Specifically, the program facilitator stated that the TRIO office was offering a similar program later that same day. This was impactful because the tenor in the room was that more men of color may have attended the MMSI sponsored program if the other department held their program on a different day. More communication between departments would eliminate duplication and competing efforts targeting the same population. Practically, DCC and other community colleges could utilize a shared campus calendar tools and formal communication channels that would potentially eliminate any scheduling conflicts. Furthermore, developing campus partnerships and collaborating through programming could potentially have greater reach if resources to support men of color were combined to reach this population of students.

Recommendations for Future Research

As a qualitative case study research study, gaps in the literature and research on the experiences of community college men of color students still exist. These gaps present opportunities to expand the research of this topic. The following will summarize opportunities for future research.

Recommendation 1 - Multiple MMSI Site Case Study

The first recommendation for future research will be to expand the single case study to multiple site case study with multiple institutions, specifically multiple community colleges receiving MMSI grant funding. The opportunity to explore the experiences of men of color at

various institutions could lead to more insight and information related to the environmental factors impacting men of color success. Additionally, conducting research at multiple MMSI sites could reveal and give insight into the institutional policies, resources, and programs that impact student success outcomes. For example, a future research study could explore the experiences of men of color attending a NC community college in an urban setting and students who may be attending a NC community college in a rural area.

Recommendation 2 – MMSI Coordinator Research

The second recommendation for future research would be to explore the experiences of administrators who are administering MMSI programming and implementing the MMSI grant. With the amount of funding that is available for MMSI grant recipients, full-time positions are likely not able to be fully funded using the grant. This would mean that administrators who are managers of the MMSI grant are likely to be institutional employee(s) who have other responsibilities or fill other positions at the institution. Research on this topic could highlight the perceived effectiveness of MMSI from the coordinator perspective and insight into how the funding supports student success outcomes for men of color.

Recommendation 3 - Men of Color Research who do not participate in MMSI Programming

The third recommendation could be to conduct a comparative study on the experiences of men of color in community college who do not participate or actively engage in MMSI programming and those who are participating in MMSI programming. A comparative study could be conducted to identify what are the differences in experiences of men of color based on their engagement in the MMSI program. Previous research indicates that men of color attending community college experience are impacted by outside responsibilities which impacts their involvement in campus programming (Harris III, F. et al., 2017). With that in mind, more

research can be conducted on the experiences of men of color who may not have the same opportunities to be engaged in the campus community as with those who have the time and ability to participate in extracurricular activities such as MMSI programming.

Recommendation 4 - Continued Impact of Global Pandemic on Higher Education

The fourth recommendation would be to conduct further research on the influence of the COVID-19 global pandemic on student success outcomes and higher education. Institutions of higher education had to quickly adjust their operations, policies, programs, and resources to meet the needs of students while transitioning to an online learning environment. Furthermore, enrollment trends, persistence rates, and student mental health implications are some of the topics and areas where higher education institutions are still feeling the impact as institutions return to in-person and normal campus operations. For participants of the study, COVID-19 not only presented learning challenges but also presented opportunities to achieve success. Future research on this topic could lead to better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on various populations, including men of color.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences for men of color attending community colleges and participating in targeted initiatives such as MMSI. Furthermore, the study sought to understand what programming efforts participants perceived to have on their success. Participants of the study provided rich insight into their personal definition of success and how that definition was formed through their lived experiences. Findings from the study provide insight regarding participants' pursuit of higher education and the belief about the value of higher education. Findings from the study reveal the inescapable impact of COVID-19 on participants' academic journeys and the significance role faculty and staff support plays in

achieving success. Additionally, results of the study provide insight into the type of programmatic efforts men of color find valuable and engaging. Initiatives such as MMSI are vital in assisting community colleges supporting this population. Participants of the study revealed the value of such initiatives but only when they are actively engaged and have awareness such programs exist on their campuses. Men of color entering community colleges are not a monolith and bring varied life experiences, goals, fears, and identities. These factors must be understood and considered when college leadership, administrators, and faculty are making decisions, implementing policies, and allocating resources to best support this population. Men of color can thrive in an environment where access to support services, financial assistance, and opportunities to build relationships with other men and students of color. While reflecting on this experience and study, my goal was to provide a voice for the experiences of men of color who are navigating academic journeys to better themselves, their lives, and their communities. The study expands the research about the experiences of men of color at community colleges but also adds to literature regarding North Carolina specific initiatives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form

Title of Study: A Qualitative Case Study on the Experiences of Men of Color Participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative. (eIRB # 25545)

Principal Investigator(s): Bradley Davis, brdavis5@ncsu.edu, 910-232-5715

Funding Source: None

NC State Faculty Point of Contact: Dr. James Bartlett II, Educational Leadership, Policy, and Human Development (ELPHD), 919-208-1697, jebartl3@ncsu.edu

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What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are invited to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of men of color community college students who participate in the Minority Male Success Initiative program at their community college. We will do this through focus group interviews, individual interviews, program observation, and document analysis.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because you may find the conversation to be interesting and want to share your experiences being involved in the MMSI program. You may not want to participate in this research because you may not want to share your experiences involving your participation in MMSI.

Specific details about the research in which you are invited to participate are contained below. If you do not understand something in this form, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If, at any time, you have questions about your participation in this research, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office. The IRB office's contact information is listed in the *What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?* section of this form.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to explore and examine the experiences of minority males participating in the MMSI at their respective North Carolina community college. The research will also explore how participants actively engaged in MMSI programmatic efforts perceive institutional programming efforts on their overall success (e.g., persistence, graduation, grades).

How many people will be in the study?
There will be approximately 7-15 participants in this study.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?
In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study and:

1. Currently enrolled student at the MMSI funded community college. This criteria is necessary because of the focus on the study being minority male students participating in the MMSI program.

2. 18 years of age or older. This criteria is necessary to prevent anyone under the age of 18 (minor) from participating in the study.

3. Completed at least one full fall or spring semester at the MMSI funded community college.

4. Identified as a male and minority student from an underrepresented population.

5. Must have participated and attended at least one MMSI sponsored program or meeting at the MMSI funded community college.

You cannot participate in this study if you do not meet the inclusion criteria.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a single 60-minute interview during the 2022-2023 academic year, which I will be digitally audio recording in order to produce a transcript for later use. All interviews will be conducted in a quiet space that is mutually convenient for us. In the event that an in-person interview is not logically possible, then I will arrange a video conference with you at a time that is mutually convenient. I would audio-record our conversation with your consent.

From the individual interviews conducted, I will want to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of men of color in the MMSI program and will conduct a focus group interview with other participants in the MMSI program.

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is 60-120 minutes.

Recording and images
If you want to participate in this research, you must agree to be audio recorded. If you do not agree to be audio recorded for your interview, you cannot participate in this research.

As a part of this research, I would like your consent to audio record you.
____ I consent to be audio recorded

____ I do not consent to be audio recorded

Risks and Benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The risks to you as a result of feeling uncomfortable or nervous to share your experiences being involved in the MMSI program. If you experience any discomfort or would rather not discuss certain topics, you are welcome to tell the researcher that you'd like to change the subject, take a break from the interview or terminate the interview at any time.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits include contributing your experiences involved in the MMSI program that could provide information to community college administrators on how to best support men of color and their success while enrolled at colleges and universities.

Right to withdraw your participation

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. To do so, just stop any research activity that you are doing or contact the researcher, Bradley Davis at brdavis5@ncsu.edu and 910-232-5715. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. James Bartlett II at jebartl3@ncsu.edu and 919-208-1697. If you choose to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this research, you can expect that the researcher(s) will redact your data from their data set, securely destroy your data, and prevent future uses of your data for research purposes wherever possible. This is possible in some, but not all, cases.

Confidentiality, personal privacy, and data management

Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that I have described to you in this form. The information that you share with me will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to me. There are very rare circumstances related to confidentiality where I may have to share information about you. Your information collected in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety. In other cases, I must report instances in which imminent harm could come to you or others.

How I manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways that I protect your personal privacy. Data that will be shared with others about you will be de-identified.De-identified data is information that at one time can directly identify you, but that I will record this data so that your identity will be separated from the data. I will have a master list with your code and real name that I can use to link to your data. Data will be stored securely on a password protected personal laptop. Electronic data will be stored in a Google Drive folder within my personal North Carolina State University Two-Factor Authentication Google Drive. Unless you give explicit permission to the contrary, no reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. All audio recordings of the interviews will be erased after transcription.

Compensation
For your participation in this study, you will receive a $30 Amazon E-gift card. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will receive a $5 Amazon E-gift card.

Emergency medical treatment
If you are hurt or injured during the study session(s), the researcher will call 911 for necessary care. There is no provision for compensation or free medical care for you if you are injured as a result of this study.

What if you are a student?
Your participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation, or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades.

What if you are an employee?
Your participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Bradley Davis at brdavis5@ncsu.edu and 910-232-5715. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. James Bartlett II at jebartl3@ncsu.edu and 919-208-1697.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. 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/

Consent to participate
By signing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

Yes, I want to be in this research study.

Name_____

Today's Date _____
No, I do not want to be in this research study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix B: COVID-19 Informed Consent Addendum

The researcher involved in this study has no symptoms of COVID-19 and have not knowingly interacted with anyone demonstrating symptoms or diagnosed as COVID-19 positive. This has been affirmed through researcher screenings and attestations.

The sanitation and cleaning measures in place during all study activities include having hand sanitizer in the interview room or space where interviews will be conducted. The researcher will also wipe down any table or desk surfaces with an antibacterial wipe after each individual interview conducted in person. The personal protective equipment that the researchers will use includes a N95 or KN95 mask. As a participant, you will be provided a N95 or KN95 mask as personal protective equipment if you choose to wear it while participating in this research.

Participants, please initial:

- _____I do not have any symptoms of COVID-19 or other highly communicable respiratory disease such as cough, fever, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, new loss of taste or smell.
- _____I have not had a positive test for COVID-19 within the last 5 days.
- _____I agree to follow all safety and sanitation procedures while participating in this study.
- _____I understand that though these safety measures are put in place to protect my health as a participant, there is a risk that I may still transmit or contract COVID-19 or other contagious respiratory disease. There is no provision for compensation or free medical care for me if I contract or transmit COVID-19 as a result of my participation in this study.
- _____I understand that to take part in this research, while I am a participant in this study I must allow my name and information about those I interacted with to be recorded for contact tracing purposes should an issue arise regarding COVID-19 infection or transmission. This allows us to confidentially notify you if an issue arises.

I have read the above information and have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I understand my responsibility related to COVID-19 as well as other communicable respiratory diseases and the risks associated with being in this study as a result. I agree to participate in this research.

_____

Participant Name

_____

Today's Date

Appendix C: Individual Student Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to meet with me. I value your willingness to participate in my research study. My name is Bradley Davis and I am a doctoral student studying higher education. I am specifically interested in the experiences of men of color who are participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI) and how participation in MMSI programs influences success outcomes for men of color. Your honest responses will strengthen the influence this study can have on how senior administrators support students of color on their campuses.

Before we begin and continue, I would like to review a few key points:

- This research broadly focuses on male students of color. The primary focus will be on students from Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian American backgrounds who identify as male.
- Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to participate in this study, to not participate, or to stop participating at any time.
- The conversation will be kept completely confidential; any information obtained from you that can identify you will not be disclosed. Your name will not be associated with any discussion results and a pseudonym will be created to remove your name being associated with the data.
- This interview will be semistructured and informal. I have a few questions and you may ask clarifying questions any time. I expect our interview to last about 60-90 minutes.
- **Ask:** *Do you give me consent and permission to record our interview today?*

Questions

1. **How would you describe your experiences at Name of Community College since your enrollment?**
    1. **Probes**
        1. **How did you come to the decision to enroll at X Community College?**
        2. **What has been the most meaningful experience since enrolling at X Community College?**
        3. **How would you describe your support system as a student? How have you built a community and a support system while being a student?**
        4. **Can you describe any influences that led you to pursue higher education?**
        5. **Can you describe how the COVID-19 pandemic has had any impact on your academic experience?**
2. **How would you describe your experiences in participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative?**
    1. **Probes**
        1. **How did you learn about the MMSI program?**
        2. **What led to your participation in MMSI?**
        3. **How many programs have you participated in?**

4. **Are there programs or activities that you wish were included in MMSI?**
5. **What has been the most meaningful experience since participating in MMSI?**
6. **In what ways has your participation in MMSI helped you personally? Academically?**
7. **Can you share a story about an experience through MMSI which has helped you navigate your academic journey or overcome a barrier?**

3. **What is your personal definition of success?**
    1. **Probes**
        1. **What influences or life experiences have contributed to how you define success?**
        2. **In what ways has your participation in MMSi contributed to your success based on your definition?**
        3. **Can you share how, in what ways, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced how you define success?**

State the following:

This concludes the interview. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and assist in this research project. Within the next few weeks, I will be contacting a focus group interview with a collective of MMSI participants. Additionally, once the interview has been transcribed, you will receive a copy to review and provide any feedback for clarification. As a reminder, all of your personally identifiable information will be removed, and I will ensure that your privacy and confidentiality are protected.

Appendix D: Observation Protocol

Researcher: Bradley Davis
Start Time:
Finish Time:
Date:
Place:
Purpose:
Title of Program/Meeting:
Number in attendance:

Description of the physical setting
What does it look like?
What is the layout? Draw a diagram.
What signage and artifacts are displayed?

Description of the activities that are occurring
What type of activity is taking place?
Who is involved in the activities?

Description of the individuals present
Who is present?
What are they doing?
What are the common characteristics of individuals?

Description of interactions between individuals
Who is talking to whom?
What is being conveyed verbally?
What is being conveyed nonverbally?
What are repetitive phrases or words?
What behaviors are present?
What unspoken values exist?

Unique aspects
What is unique about the physical space?
What is unique about the individuals?
What is unique about interactions between individuals?

Appendix E: Student Recruitment Email

Dear MMSI Participant,

My name is Bradley Davis and I am currently a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University in the College of Education's Community College Leadership doctoral program. I am conducting a dissertation study to gather information from men of color who are participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative at your community college.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of community college students, in particular men of color, who participate in the Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI). As a participant in the MMSI programs at your community college, I would like to invite you to participate in an interview for this study. I anticipate an interview lasting about 60 minutes during [insert dates] in Spring 2023 at a time and location which is most convenient to you at your community college. Select participants will also be asked to participate in a small focus group interview that will be held at a location convenient for all participants. If you are unable to meet in person, a video conference interview would be offered to you for your participation. I will ask questions related to your experience with MMSI and your perception of your participation in the program on your overall success as a student.

Please complete a quick questionnaire using this link by April 12, 2023 to be considered for participation in the study. You will receive a $30 Amazon e-gift card as a thank you upon completion of the individual interview. Thank you so much for considering this request and opportunity!

Feel free to contact me at brdavis5@ncsu.edu if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Bradley Davis
Doctoral Candidate- Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

Appendix F: Student Selection Email

Dear MMSI Participant,

My name is Bradley Davis and I am currently a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University in the College of Education's Community College Leadership doctoral program. I am conducting a dissertation study to gather information from men of color who are participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative at your community college.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of community college students, in particular men of color, who participate in the Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI).

You recently completed an online interest survey which collected demographic information along with your interest in participating in the research study. Based on your responses, you have been selected to participate in the study. The next step in this process is to schedule an interview date and time with you. I will be conducting interviews April 18, 2023 through April 20, 2023 at Pitt Community College. Please use the following Calendly link to sign-up for an interview time. I will send a follow-up email confirming the date, time, and location. If you are unable to meet in person, I can offer you the opportunity to conduct your interview via Zoom.

You will receive a $30 Amazon e-gift card as a thank you upon completion of the interview. Thank you so much for considering this request and opportunity!

Feel free to contact me at brdavis5@ncsu.edu if you have any questions. Additionally, if you know any of your peers who would also be interested in participating, I ask that you pass along my contact information.

Thank you,
Bradley Davis
Doctoral Candidate- Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

Appendix G: Student Reminder Email

Dear MMSI Participant,

My name is Bradley Davis and I am currently a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University in the College of Education's Community College Leadership doctoral program. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of community college students, in particular men of color, who participate in the Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI). You have been selected as a participant in the study and I thank you for your interest in participating.

This email serves as notification as a reminder that your scheduled [FOCUS GROUP/INDIVIDUAL] interview for the study will take place on [DATE] at [TIME PM/AM] at [LOCATION].

Please do not participate in the research procedures if you have a fever and/or shortness of breath, unexplained cough, extreme fatigue; if in the last 7 days, have you been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed as having COVID-19 or other contagious respiratory illness by a healthcare professional. Face masks will be provided to you should you choose to wear one during the research procedures. Research staff may also be wearing face masks.

Feel free to contact me at brdavis5@ncsu.edu if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Bradley Davis
Doctoral Candidate- Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

Appendix H: Student Confirmation Email [In-Person]

Dear MMSI Participant,

This email serves as confirmation for your participation in the study on the experiences of men or color who participate in the Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI) at [Name] Community College.

Based on your availability and preference, your individual interview will be held at [TIME PM/AM] on [DATE] at [LOCATION AT COMMUNITY COLLEGE].

Please do not participate in the research procedures if you have a fever and/or shortness of breath, unexplained cough, extreme fatigue; if in the last 7 days, have you been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed as having COVID-19 or other contagious respiratory illness by a healthcare professional. Face masks will be provided to you should you choose to wear one during the research procedures. Research staff may also be wearing face masks

Feel free to contact me at brdavis5@ncsu.edu if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Bradley Davis
Doctoral Candidate- Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

Appendix I: Student Thank You and Member Check Email

Dear MMSI Participant,

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation study focusing on the experiences of men of color who participate in the Minority Male Success Initiative. I sincerely appreciate your time and willingness to share your experiences in order to best learn how administrators and community college presidents can best support men of color on their academic journeys.

Attached you will find a summary of preliminary findings and overarching themes for your records only. I appreciate any time you can commit to reviewing this document and providing feedback on the findings. You will observe that this document does not include an extensive list of implications in an effort to maintain brevity. I am happy to share more in follow-up conversations regarding my implications and future research. My hope is that, with your help, community college leaders and administrators can better understand the experiences of men of color on their campuses in order to implement best practices that promote student success.

Feel free to contact me at brdavis5@ncsu.edu if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Bradley Davis
Doctoral Candidate- Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

Appendix J: Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI) Study Interest Form

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Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI) Study Interest Form

Thank you for your interest in participating in the Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI) research study. This research is being conducted by a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University in order to learn more about the experiences of community college students who participate in the MMSI programs at their community college. Participation in the study includes taking part in one 60-minute interview with the researcher at your community college in a mutually convenient space. Participants will also be asked to participate in a smaller focus group interview as well. If accommodations are needed, a video conference interview can be offered for participation. The following questionnaire will be used to determine your eligibility for this study. You will be notified about your status as a study participant by [date]. You will also receive a $30 Amazon e-gift card as a thank you if you complete the interview. Thank you for responding to the questions below.

Q1 Please enter your name. (Last, First).

_____

Q2 Please enter your email address.

_____

Q3 What is your race/ethnicity?

_____

Q4 What is your gender identity?

_____

Q5 Are you at least 18 years of age?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q6 What is your current enrollment status?

- Full-Time (1)
- Part-Time (2)
- Not currently enrolled (3)

Q7 Current Overall GPA.

_____

Q8 What type of program are your currently pursuing?

- High School Dual Enrollment (1)
- Continuing Education (2)
- Noncredit Offering (3)
- Certificate Program (4)
- Associate Degree (5)
- Transfer credits to a 4-year college or university (6)
- Other (7)

Q9 What is your anticipated graduation date? (Month/Year)

_____

Q10 Please enter your current major(s) or specific program of study?

_____

Page Break

Q11 Are you interested in participating in an individual interview to discuss your involvement and experience with MMSI?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q12 Are you interested in participating in a focus group with other MMSI participants to discuss your involvement and experience with MMSI?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q13 How long have you participated in the MMSI program?

- Less than 1 semester (1)
- 1-2 semesters (2)
- 3-4 semesters (3)
- 5-6 semesters (4)
- More than 6 semesters (5)

Q14 How many MMSI programs or meetings have you attended since enrolling at your community college?

- ○ 1 (1)
- ○ 1-3 (2)
- ○ 3-5 (3)
- ○ More than 5 (4)

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix K: Recruitment Flyer

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

RESEARCH STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF MEN OF COLOR PARTICIPATING IN MMSI PROGRAMS

Criteria:

- Currently enrolled student
- At least 18 years of age or older
- Completed at least one full fall or spring semester
- Identify as male and minority student from an underrepresented population
- Must have participated and attended at least one MMSI sponsored program or meeting

Participants will be compensated for their participation in the study with a $30 Amazon E-Gift Card.

Participation will include a 60 minute individual interview with the researcher. Interviews will be conducted in person or via video conference. **Participation for the study is limited. Interested participants will be notified if the number of participants reaches capacity.*

If you are interested in participating, please use the QR code to complete the interest questionnaire. For any questions, contact the NCSU researcher below:

Bradley Davis at brdavis5@ncsu.edu