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**THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MEN CREATING A THIRD SPACE  
AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION**

by

Steven E. Radwanski

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
April 3, 2019

Dissertation Advisor: James Coaxum, Ph.D.

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## Abstract

Steven Edward Radwanski  
THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MEN CREATING A THIRD SPACE AT A  
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

2018-2019

Dr. James Coaxum, Ph.D.

Doctor of Education

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black men creating third spaces at a predominantly White institution (PWI). The use of the third space theory permitted the researcher to examine both the student's current cultural experiences and the campus climate to understand better how Black men create a third space (Bhabha, 1994). Many Black men have found themselves in between two cultures their previous cultural experiences, and the campus climate of the institution they are attending.

The research gathered and analyzed through this study indicates that the third space theory can be situated to the student's journey in creating a sense of belonging at a PWI. The third space allows students to explore their experiences previous to attending a college and university and their initial experiences of attending a PWI while finding a sense of belonging. This research can be used to understand better how Black men at PWIs discover their sense of belonging while navigating the many challenges they will encounter at a PWI.

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## Chapter 1

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black men creating third spaces at a predominantly White institution. Third space theory permits the researcher to examine both the students' current cultural experiences and the campus climate to understand better how Black men make sense of their previous high school experiences, and the experiences of attending a PWI while finding their sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). Many Black men find themselves caught between two cultures: the culture of their previous experiences, and the culture that shapes the campus climate of the institution they are attending. The theory of double consciousness put forth by Du Bois (1903), has been referenced in previous research to illustrate the significance of having to navigate identity development and the campus climate (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Based on the theory of double consciousness, the concept of biculturalism has also been discussed to explain how some Black men navigate PWIs (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Research drawing on that concept has indicated a clear disconnect between the culture of Black students and the culture present at PWIs and, further, that this disconnect has negatively affected the success of Black male students (Bohr, 1994; Diemer, 2007; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b; Melendez, 2008; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). Using Bhabha's (1994) third space as a transitional area while creating a sense of belonging takes the literature a step further by moving beyond bicultural identities and examining the hybrid or transitional spaces. PWI's do not provide the resources

necessary for Black men to be successful academically or socially (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). This study uses a narrative inquiry methodology to draw upon Black males' previous cultural experiences and their experiences at Forman University, a PWI.

### **Research Questions**

A qualitative approach ensured that the research questions explored the lived experiences of Black men at a PWI, Forman University. The research questions framed the discussion around the significance of this research as it sits within the body of research concerning Black men. To further understand the experiences of Black men at PWIs and the interaction of Bhabha's (1994) third space, the following research questions were explored:

1. How do Black men describe their experience at Forman University?
2. How does the culture of Black males impact their current collegiate experiences and persistence?
3. How do Black men make sense of their previous experiences in conjunction with the predominantly White culture of their current institution?
4. How does third space theory help to explain the intersections of race and gender at Forman University?

### **Significance of the Study**

As higher education in the United States continues to evolve, institutions must ensure the success of Black men. Higher education administrators and educators must do more to connect Black men to faculty, staff, and their peers (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

This study sought to examine how Black men make sense of their experiences while

attending a PWI. Research has provided valuable information on how to create environments and cultures that provide support to Black male students (Brown, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Some institutions have created mentorship programs that connect Black staff and faculty with Black students to guide them in an unfriendly and cold institutional culture (Brown, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007).

This study also sought to understand the experiences that Black men have at a PWI and to explore the cultures that Black men create in such an environment. Existing literature has examined double consciousness, in addition to how Black male students' cultures intersect and overlap with the institutional culture while finding their fit in the PWI culture (De Anda, 1984; Diemer, 2007; Du Bois, 1903; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper S. R. et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b; Melendez, 2008; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). However, the literature has not explored double consciousness in conjunction with creating a third or hybrid culture where the students can transition to a sense of belonging by challenging assumptions through the negotiation and co-creation of identities (Bhabha, 1994; Muller & Druin, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). Double consciousness was the concept first used to describe the two worlds that Black people must navigate in the American culture (Bhabha, 1994). The third space theory came about after double consciousness in another context around the occupation of Northern Africa by the French (Bhabha, 1994). However, very little research has explored the creation of a third space in higher education (Bhabha, 1994). Third space theory provides a framework to explore the transitional areas Black men must navigate while finding their sense of belonging at a PWI while building upon the notion of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903; Bhabha,

1994; Strayhorn, 2012). The third space theory has predominantly been used to describe oppressive cultures, and it is applied in the present study to Black men attending a PWI (Bhabha, 1994). This research serves as a new way to describe how Black men navigate PWIs and make sense of their own culture, the culture of the institution and, furthermore, how Black men transition to finding their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). The goal of this study is to create a better understanding of the experiences of Black men in navigating a third space at a PWI.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Black Male Student:** Any student who self-identifies as Black and male.

**Biculturalism:** When a person can step out of one culture and place themselves in another culture, and transition between the two cultures, while each culture remains separate and distinct (Valentine, 1971).

**Double consciousness:** Du Bois' (1903) concept that Blacks must live with two identities in America: "Negro" and "American."

**Dual socialization:** When individuals find it possible to understand and predict two cultural environments successfully and adjust their behavior according to the norms of each culture depending upon the amount of overlap between the two cultures (De Anda, 1984).

**Lived Experiences:** The intersection of individual belief and action with culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

**Persistence:** The ability of a student to stay enrolled at a higher education institution and overcome obstacles until successfully graduating.

**Predominantly White institution:** A higher education institution with a student population comprised of at least 60 percent of White students (Harper, 2012a).

**Retention:** The continued enrolment of students at the same institution where they started a program until the students complete that program. Students who transfer to other institutions before completing a degree are not considered to have been retained.

**Third Space:** A concept proposed by Bhabha (1994) that describes a psychological and behavioral change in individuals and groups of one culture that have long-term contact with another culture and that, by absorbing aspects of both cultures, create a third culture (Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, & Buki, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

Using a narrative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of Black men at Forman University, a PWI will permit the institution and administrators to better focus their resources on capitalizing on the successes of Black men. While a significant amount of research has examined Black men at PWIs, the research has consistently stopped short of exploring how the cultures of these students and the culture of the institution can merge to create a third or hybrid culture. Du Bois (1903) described the two worlds in which Black people must learn to operate in the United States, which can be compared to the experiences of Black men navigating a PWI culture. However, no existing studies have examined the role of third space as a transitional area for creating a sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; De Anda, 1984; Strayhorn, 2012). Using Bhabha's (1994) third space theory also allowed the students to explore their previous culture, Forman University's culture, and finding their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). This research will serve



as an essential foundation for PWIs such as Forman University to understand their institution's cultural impact on Black men. To further understand the impact of this research on Black men, a discussion of the problem statement occurred followed by a literature review. The following chapter presents the theories and frameworks that support the foundation of Black men and third space research.

## Chapter 2

### Problem Statement

Student retention and success is a significant concern to professionals in the field of higher education. Many of the students who enter higher education institutions withdraw before graduation. In the United States, as of 2015, only 59 percent of higher education students graduated, meaning that more than a third of the students did not persist (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Student retention and success were initially attributed to failings in the student's abilities and attributes, not the institution (Helms, 1990; Phinney, 1992). This early reasoning faulted the students, which led administrators to believe nothing needed to change at the institution. Administrators could easily blame the students for their failure to succeed without any self-reflection. However, in the 1970s research began to look more closely at the relationships within institutional environments, with a particular focus on how those relationships contributed to a student's success (Johnson & Arbona, 2006). This research explored not only the environment of institutions but also the engagement in institutions and how important it was for students, especially in their first year, to become connected to the institution (Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1987, 1999). These findings are the cornerstone of current student retention and persistence research more than 40 years later.

The connection between a student and the members of an institution remain a foundational concept in student success. As retention research has evolved, differing factors, including the student's background as well as the economic, cultural, and social culture of an institution, have shaped the study of student retention. With the explosion of

research concerning student success and retention, in the 1990s many student affairs practitioners began to implement new theories in practice. However, practitioners soon realized that while the research could change higher education institutions, the studies had been based on White and mainly middle-class students. The research did not address gender or ethnicity and how those factors affected persistence and success in higher education. New research has since emerged on individual student groups, with more recent findings indicating that Black men have persisted less often than their White male and female counterparts (Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Strayhorn, 2016; Styron Jr, 2010). Broad areas of study regarding the low persistence rates of Black men have focused on the type of institution and the environment or culture of the institution. (Diemer, 2007; Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016; Harper, S. R. et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Melendez, 2008; Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Holmes, 2007; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014; Strayhorn, 2016; Terenzini, Yaeger, Bohr, Pascarella, & Amaury, 1997).

There has been a specific focus on Black men and their experiences in higher education institutions. Palmer and Gasman (2008) qualitatively examined the role of social capital in promoting success for Black men. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as how some individuals are privileged because of their membership in a social network. They conclude that faculty and staff must go beyond their job duties and serve as mentors and guides if Black men are to gain social capital (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). The study recognized the importance of institutional connectedness, mainly with faculty and staff, and its recommendation provided an immediate remedy to Black students' lack of social

capital; however, the study stopped short of addressing how students holistically develop as they move through their experiences at a PWI.

Another important study by Strayhorn (2014) empirically studied Black men's sense of belonging at PWIs. Strayhorn (2014) noted that Black men at PWIs often feel marginalized, socially isolated, unsupported, and unwelcomed by the PWI culture. Strayhorn (2014) concluded that higher education professionals, especially those who work in housing and residential life, can deliberately create a sense of belonging for Black men by offering themed housing, residential colleges, or living-learning communities (Strayhorn, 2014). Strayhorn (2014) notes that a sense of belonging at the institution is a critical factor in retaining Black men at PWIs, and administrators must, therefore, improve in creating a sense of belonging to retain these students. However, this study does not provide detailed examples of how Black men navigate transitional areas at a PWI to find their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2014). There is a gap in the research in understanding the experiences of Black men as they transition from their previous experiences, and their experiences when confronted with the PWI culture of their institution.

Multiple studies examine different aspects of the lives of Black male students at higher education institutions, and both studies do so in a manner that provides essential information on how retention can be improved; however, both studies also fail to examine how Black men experience those transitions. Those transitional areas include their previous cultures, their initial experiences at a PWI, and ultimately finding their sense of belonging (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012; Strayhorn 2014).

Strayhorn's (2012;2014) sense of belonging is a critical indicator in retaining Black men,

but the sense of belonging can develop with the assistance of, staff, faculty, and peers when conditions align. While it should be the goal of every higher education institution to provide a supportive, welcoming, and comfortable environment for Black male students, we know that is just not the case at all institutions.

Within the last ten years, research has shown that a contributing factor to Black male attrition has been the negativity of the PWI culture at many higher education institutions (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, et al., 2011; Harper, 2005, 2009b, 2012a; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Hughes, 2010; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004; Strayhorn, 2016; Terenzini et al., 1997). Many PWIs were founded at a time in the United States when there was no or minimal access for Black men. Thus, cultures at many higher education institutions were created to support White middle-class students (Hannon et al., 2016). Over the last 50 years, the demographics of PWIs have shifted because of landmark court decisions desegregating institutions of higher learning and dismantling dual education systems that had been created to segregate Black students (Hannon et al., 2016). While Black students have been attending PWIs in the United States since the mid-1900s, these institutions are still ill-equipped to address the retention of this student population (Hannon et al., 2016). A common question is how Black men make sense of their experiences at PWIs and achieve success despite a culture that often isolates and marginalizes them. One of the most profound ways colleges and universities have attempted to increase persistence among Black male students has been to create intentional connections among these students, their administrators, and their faculty members. Cuyjet (2006) provides more than eight examples of successful programs that aim to create connections for Black men. One of these programs, the Black Men's

Collective, has been applied at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey (Catching, 2006). This program provided opportunities for Black men to interact with other Black men of varying ages and experiences (Catching, 2006). The mission of the Black Men's Collective was to provide a multigenerational forum for Black male students to connect and discuss issues pertinent to their success through the use of diverse cultural, political, and sociological perspectives (Catching, 2006). Many other higher education institutions are beginning to intentionally foster these connections by implementing similar programs that start in the students' first year and continue beyond graduation (Catching, 2006).

The retention of Black men continues to be an area where colleges and universities must improve. Quantitatively, colleges and universities have identified this issue; qualitative research must continue to identify specific problems at specific institutions (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, 2009a; Harper et al., 2011; Melendez, 2008; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). For example, one area of study has been the formation of peer groups to provide support for these students (Strayhorn, 2012). Peer groups provide a safe place to share and express themselves in a way they can within the general campus culture (Strayhorn, 2012). Many theoretical models have addressed the retention and success of Black men by creating specific interactions or safe places where Black men can be their authentic selves. Many scholars recommend that higher education institutions need to do more, namely by creating more programs and initiatives aimed at retaining Black men and changing the culture of these institutions; however, in reality, retaining Black male students are not a priority for every higher education institution. More importantly, the study attempts to understand how

academically successful Black male students can use third space as a transitional area to find their sense of belonging.

### **Literature Review**

Black men have had a tenuous relationship with higher education in the United States because of the country's history of slavery, segregation, separate-but-equal laws, and continuing societal inequalities. W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) recognized that Blacks in the United States must understand and live with a double consciousness, which he describes as a "twoness, an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts . . . two warring ideals." Du Bois' (1903) double consciousness theory, as it has come to be known, describes not only how Black people interact in American society but also how they interact with America's higher education system. Black students at PWIs must learn to navigate a college or university culture that is cold and not welcoming for many of them.

Du Bois (1903) articulates, "He (Blacks) simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face." Today, doors of opportunity in the United States are often still closed to many Black men. While higher education institutions espouse diversity in their student population, Black men are often isolated and do not make connections with the existing campus culture (Cuyjet, 2006). The disconnect between Black men and PWIs' institutional culture puts these students at an inherent disadvantage, often leading to their departure from higher education institutions before graduation.

This chapter is organized into three distinct sections examining Black men's connection to higher education institutions. The first section reviews the historical perspectives of how Black men began to enter the segregated American higher education

system and then discusses the current issues affecting Black men in modern day colleges and universities. This discussion frames the second section concerning Black male persistence at PWIs. The third section builds upon the review of Black male persistence by discussing theoretical models of how these students make sense of their experiences at PWIs. This chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that builds upon the existing theoretical models and presents a new theoretical model that aims to illustrate how Black men experience the culture of a PWI in light of their own cultural experiences and what the outcomes of those experiences may be.

### **Historical Perspectives of Black Men in Higher Education**

In 1950, the case of *Sweatt v. Painter* (339 U.S. 629) came before the Supreme Court. A Black man, Herman Marion Sweatt, was seeking admission to the University of Texas Law School (Lavergne, 2010). Since there were no other law schools at the University of Texas for Black students, the Supreme Court ruled that not admitting Sweatt to the law school would violate the separate-but-equal clause (Lavergne, 2010). This decision ultimately led to the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which struck down the separate-but-equal-clause and required states to desegregate public schools and higher education institutions. However, even with *Brown* as the law of the land, desegregation was a slow and challenging process that also became enveloped in the civil rights movement. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed an executive order adopting affirmative action as national practice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Affirmative action is the practice of considering ethnicity as a criterion, but not the only criteria to create a more diverse college or university community. Many court challenges to this practice have since emerged, including both *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California* (438



*U.S. 265, 1978*) and *Grutter v. Bollinger (539 U.S. 306, 2003)*; per the results of these two cases, colleges and universities, if they see fit, may now narrow affirmative action programs aimed at creating a diverse intellectual climate (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Initiatives such as affirmative action are essential to providing Black men an avenue to the United States higher education system. While affirmative action and the legal system have technically provided increased access to higher education, the current data showed that Black men make up only a small portion of enrollments of across the higher education landscape (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In short, though the gains made by society to increase access to higher education for Black men have been incremental, the current American higher education system is still struggling to increase persistence and graduation rates among this specific student population.

**Black men and the current American higher education system.** The enrollment of Black men in higher education has grown by 3.9 percent since 1976, but Black men still account for only 12.2 percent of the population attending higher education institutions (2015). Research by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) demonstrated that Black men receive the least amount of degrees conferred (34 percent) compared to any other group and are outpaced, two to one, by Black women, who receive 66 percent of the degrees conferred to Black students in the United States. Black men have instead found themselves entering unfamiliar and unwelcoming colleges and universities offering little assistance for navigating a complicated and confusing campus culture (Ingram, Williams, Coaxum, Hilton, & Harrell, 2016). Even though Black may have more access than previous generations, the campus culture of PWIs often leaves them feeling isolated and disconnected and, in turn, frequently leads to them

leaving PWIs (Harper, 2006b; Melendez, 2008; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Strayhorn, 2014). In identifying that Black men are not persisting or graduating at the rates of their peers, the next section will identify several specific areas where Black students' academic and social pursuits could be better supported.

### **Black Male Persistence**

The concepts of student retention and persistence can be traced back to Spady (1970), and Tinto's (1975) work examining social and academic integration and how those two factors impact student attrition at higher education institutions. The foundation of these concepts can be tied to the patterns of integration between the student and other members of the institution, especially during the first year of the student's enrollment at the institution (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975). Tinto's (1975) work ushered in the field of study surrounding student retention and persistence (Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Spady, 1970; Styron Jr, 2010; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1999, 2004, 2006, 2007; Torres, 2006). The foundational works concerning student retention and persistence spawned the study of involvement in higher education that began in the 1970s and persists today (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975). Over the last 40 years, these works have dominated the higher education landscape in determining why students do not persist, especially after their first year at higher education institutions.

These works, however, have focused predominantly on White middle-class students (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Until recently, the literature has not considered the role that gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or many other factors should play in the discussion surrounding student retention (Blumenfeld, Weber, & Rankin, 2016;

Bonner, 2001; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004; Harper, 2009b; Hughes & Bonner II, 2006; King, 2000; Palmer et al., 2011a; Strayhorn, 2016). Black men have thus become a primary concern at many higher education colleges and universities. Palmer, Wood, Dancy, and Strayhorn (2014) cite four points regarding the importance of providing support to Black men and conducting research about persistence. First, Black men are the lowest-performing demographic at higher education institutions (Palmer et al., 2014). Second, data suggest the challenges facing Black men at higher education institutions may be worsening due to declining graduation rates (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). Third, research around Black male persistence points to better success rates at different institutions, such as private not-for-profit or public four-year institutions (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). Fourth, research has shown that historically Black colleges and universities have higher chances of fostering success for Black men, as these institutions award degrees to high proportions of their students (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014).

The current research points to five main areas where institutions can implement practices that would improve Black men's persistence: (1) financial support (Harper, 2012a; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014); (2) peer support (Harper, 2012a; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014); (3) family support (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014); (4) faculty and mentor interactions (Kim & Hargrove, 2013); and (5) the campus climate and culture and its impacts on Black men (Chang, Milem, & Antonio, 2011; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004). These five areas are each explored further to provide a foundation of critical areas of concern for Black men in higher education institutions.

**Financial support for Black men.** Many students struggle to attend higher education institutions due to the cost of higher education. Among Black men, research has shown that anxiety about paying for higher education is one of the leading factors for not persisting (Harper, 2006b; Harper, 2012a; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). For example, some Black men do not persist because they have to work extra hours to pay for their education while also supporting their families (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). Studies have shown that financial aid in the form of scholarships and other fellowships is tied their success, while other types of financial support may not be as helpful (Harper, 2012a; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). For instance, loans tend to be more helpful to White students than students of color (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014).

More practical solutions may include enticing more Black men to participate in student leadership positions that provide financial support such as being a resident assistant. These positions assist by paying for housing and providing steady income to help students cope with the financial stress of higher education (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper, 2012b). Ultimately, financial barriers must be removed by administrators and policymakers to ensure that Black men can succeed without the fear of financial hardship (Harper, 2012b).

**Peer support for Black men.** While Tinto's (1975) seminal work focuses only on White students, it does stress making connections during the first semesters of a student's entrance into higher education institutions as a way of increasing student persistence. This aspect of Tinto's (1975) work remains true today. Astin's (1993) work emphasizes that the single most potent source of influence on the undergraduate student

experience is the peer group; he argues that the interactions among peers have far-reaching effects on the student's learning and development. Current literature supports the notion that many Black men at PWIs face isolation, alienation, and hostility (Brown, 2006; Harper S. R. et al., 2011; Hodge & Hodge, 2015; Palmer et al., 2011a, Strayhorn, 2012). To combat these feelings of isolation, researchers have identified involvement in student organizations, such as student government, resident assistant positions, and other groups as ways to make Black men feel more comfortable in a predominantly White culture (Brown, 2006; Harper et al., 2011).

Brown (2006) conducted a qualitative case study at PWIs to further examine previous findings that out-of-classroom experiences, activities, and programs that assist Black men in coping and persisting. Based on his qualitative data, Brown proposed five ways that student affairs practitioners can create receptive environments for Black men: (1) organize programs that allow Black men to quickly see what clubs and organizations are available at the institution, (2) educate the PWI about the challenges regarding persistence that Black men encounter, (3) establish a mentoring program with faculty and staff for Black male students, (4) allow Black men to create communities through athletics and intermural activities, and (5) create a specific group for Black men that allows for openness and safe conversations. Brown's research remains consistent with current institutional practices and is supported by Harper and Quaye's (2007) research reaffirming the importance of student organizations.

Harper and Quaye (2007) analyzed data from a qualitative study that examined student organizations as a venue for identity development for Black male students. The researchers found that student organizations were a place where Black men could explore

their “Black Identity” in a safe environment with other Black students. Black male students who were able to explore their identity in a safe atmosphere became more comfortable at the institutions that were studied, thus contributing to their persistence (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Peer support continues to be an influential factor in student engagement and persistence at higher educations.

**Family support for Black men.** While early research encouraged students to distance themselves from their family to gain independence (Tinto, 1975), recent research has shown that the importance of family in the role of Black men’s education cannot be understated (Guiffrida, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Some of the first work regarding student retention was Tinto’s (1975) first retention model, which called for the student to sever all connections with their previous relationships to integrate fully into the campus environment. This work, which was predominantly based on White middle-class students, became a popular aspect of retention theory. However, over time, this aspect of retention was not sufficient for minority students and even detrimental to their success at higher education institutions (Guiffrida, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Palmer, Maramba, & Holmes, 2011b; Tinto, 2006). Many scholarly works and even Tinto (2006) himself have revised their work, recognizing that students of color need to maintain cultural traditions and supportive family relationships (Guiffrida, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Palmer et al., 2011b). The literature has also recognized that Black men in particular benefit from these critical connections and relationships (Guiffrida, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Palmer et al., 2011b).

In short, the current research connects the importance of family to Black male success in a PWI environment (Guiffrida, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Palmer et al.,

2011b). Students' families have been shown to play a variety of roles including encouragement, advisement, and financial support (Guiffrida, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Palmer et al., 2011b). It is also important to note that even when students are first-generation students, and no other family members hold a post-secondary degree, the family still serves as an important factor in academic success and retention (Palmer et al., 2011b). Even extended family is influential in academic success and retention (Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Palmer et al., 2011b). The existing research has recommended that student affairs practitioners find ways to incorporate the families of Black men into orientation and other activities to further encourage success and persistence (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Herndon & Hirt, 2004).

**Faculty and administrator mentorship of Black men.** The role of faculty and administrator mentorship is also key to the retention of Black men. Much like the campus social climate, the classroom has also been reported by Black men to raise feelings of isolation (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). Bonner and Bailey (2006) stress that ideal mentorship experiences are a pairing of Black faculty with Black students, allowing the faculty member to act as an academic mentor. While it is not essential that Black faculty serve as mentors, Palmer et al. (2014) recommend that faculty be student-centered, so they can use their natural energy to promote student success programs that are otherwise rarely offered at higher education institutions. Bonner and Bailey (2006) make three important recommendations for mentors of Black men: (1) provide a safe space for the expression of personal experiences, (2) facilitate and promote the understanding of differences, and (3) provide opportunities to explore Black manhood issues.

While the previously referenced research on faculty and staff mentorship have focused on the personal and academic development of the students, another aspect is cultural guidance at a PWI (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Museus and Quaye (2009) stress the importance of campus cultural agents, who can come in the form of faculty and staff. Additional research has stressed the importance of building close connections with upper-level staff, deans, and presidents who can also assist students in navigating an unfamiliar and isolating institutional culture (Strayhorn, 2016).

**Understanding the impact of campus culture on Black men.** To better understand the campus culture and climate, Chang, Milem, and Antonio (2011) created a campus climate framework that examines specific aspects of the institutional culture. The five dimensions are (1) compositional diversity, (2) a historical legacy of inclusion or



exclusion, (3) the psychological climate, (4) the behavioral climate, and (5) the organizational and structural diversity (Chang et al., 2011). Compositional diversity refers to the numerical and proportional representation of the various student populations on campus (Chang et al., 2011). The next dimension references a historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion and examines historical vestiges of the institution (Chang et al., 2011). It is noted that PWIs have much longer histories of exclusion than inclusion and that historical narrative continues to shape the changing dynamic of college and university campuses (Chang et al., 2011). The psychological climate refers to the views held by individuals about intergroup relationships as well as the institutional responses to diversity, perceptions of discrimination or conflict among peer groups, and attitudes held toward individuals from different backgrounds (Chang et al., 2011). The dimension examining the behavioral climate consists of the status of social interaction on campus, the nature of interactions between and among individuals from different backgrounds, and the quality of intergroup relations (Chang et al., 2011). The fifth and last dimension, organizational and structural diversity, examines how benefits for some groups become embedded in the institutional structures and processes (Chang et al., 2011).

Campus climate and culture have also been examined in research on student persistence. The culture or the environment in which students enter when attending colleges and universities was first considered as context and studied in terms of student persistence in Tinto's (1987) student persistence theory. Up until that point, if students were not successful at a college or university, it was considered the fault of the student and was not attributed to any environmental, social, or psychological factor (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004). Tinto's (1987) persistence model stated that integration into the

social and academic cultures of a higher education institution would lead to student retention. Over time, Tinto's (1987) work came under scrutiny for applying only to White students. Initially, Tinto (1987) determined that students must separate from their previous cultures of family and friends to fully integrate into the campus community. Being fully integrated into the campus community and abandoning their previous cultures would ensure success at their college or university (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004; Tinto, 1987).

Kuh and Whitt (1988) examined culture in the context of higher education and found that it is the social or normative glue of the institution and serves the purposes of (1) conveying a sense of identity, (2) facilitating commitment to an entity such as the institution or peer group, (3) enhancing the stability of a group social system, and (4) providing a sense-making device that guides and shapes behavior (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004). Kuh and Whitt (1988) caution that institutions with intentionally or unintentionally properties deeply embedded in their culture can make it difficult for members of historically underrepresented groups to prosper socially and environmentally (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004). Over time, research has indeed shown that minority students are unlikely to give up their previous affiliations and lose contact with their cultural groups in order to find membership in or integrate into the larger PWI culture (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004). Underrepresented students, such as Black men, potentially find themselves decidedly at odds with the prevailing social and cultural norms on campus (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004).

More focused research studying the effect of campus climate on Black men found that campus climate has a significant effect on Black men's persistence, especially at

predominantly White colleges and universities (Diemer, 2007; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper S. R. et al., 2011; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Melendez, 2008; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011b; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). Black men have expressed feelings of isolation and alienation, which have prevented them from feeling connected to the campus community of the institution (Cerezo, Lyda, Enriquez, Beristianos, & Connor, 2015). In other situations, these students have even reported feelings of hostility that prevented them from creating essential social networks and resulted in their withdrawing from the institution (Cerezo et al., 2015). Research exploring the importance of campus climates at HBCUs has shown that Black men find more significant opportunities for connection with their peers and Black faculty (Palmer et al., 2010). Campus climate and culture is a contributing factor to the attrition of Black men on college campuses. Based on this alienating culture, research has focused on several specific solutions such as intentional peer groups and specific programs encouraging faculty and staff mentorship. Campus climate plays a significant role in the lives of these students, contributing to their sense of belonging, which in turn coincides with student retention (Newman, Wood, & Harris III, 2015, Strayhorn, 2012; 2014). Based on this body of research, several theoretical models have been developed to explain how these students successfully navigate PWIs.

### **Theoretical Models of Black Men at PWIs**

Theoretical models serve as an essential tool in understanding the experiences of Black men at PWIs. These models seek to understand how these students make sense of living in multiple cultures, whether socially, or academically. For instance, Du Bois'

(1903) double consciousness speaks broadly about how Black American's must operate in two different worlds in the American culture. Double consciousness has been adapted to higher education describing how Black students must contend with a PWI campus climate. Other theoretical models such as biculturation and dual socialization provide theories for how Black men navigate the campus culture but remain grounded in their own culture and beliefs (De Anda, 1984; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). This section explores the differing concepts of how Black men must learn to live in multiple cultures and often between cultures to be successful in America's higher education system.

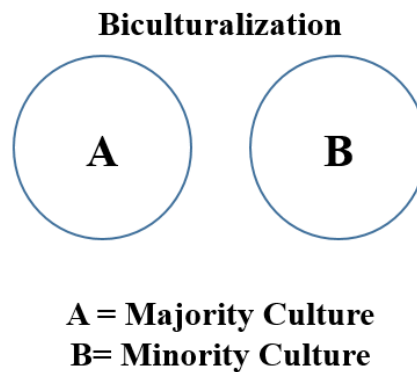
**Double consciousness.** Du Bois' (1903) concept of double consciousness was created to shed light on the burden that Black Americans face in having to operate in two cultures (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). The most cited description of Du Bois' (1903) double consciousness is "twoness, an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts . . . two warring ideals." Du Bois (1903) tackles three specific issues when referring to double consciousness. First, Du Bois (1903) addresses the power of White stereotypes in Black life and thought (Bruce, 1992). Second, he argues that double consciousness has created practical racism that excludes every Black American from the mainstream of society and thereby places the onus on Black Americans to decide if they are more African or American (Bruce, 1992). Third, Du Bois (1903) refers to the importance of understanding the Black experience of suffering and the importance of their faith and spirituality (Bruce, 1992).

Since Du Bois (1903) introduced the concept, double consciousness has been taken from its original context and applied to Black men at PWIs (Ingram et al., 2016). Where Du Bois' (1903) original meaning described society, the concept's application to PWIs has provided insight into the experiences of Black men (Ingram et al., 2016; Means

et al., 2017; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Pope & Cuyjet, 2006). Pope and Cuyjet (2006) have suggested that a third consciousness may exist for Black students who are also first-generation students. Some research has even identified a quadruple consciousness among gay Black men, who have to live in, in between, and among four different cultures (Means et al., 2017; Mitchell & Means, 2014). Others have used the term “cool pose” to describe a coping mechanism that some Black men utilize to conform to the dominant culture portraying an image of strength and power (Billson & Majors, 1992; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006).

Literte (2010) challenged Du Bois (1903)’ application of double consciousness because of the context in which it was used more than 100 years ago. However, after some discussion, the research still contends that double consciousness can be applied to students of varying backgrounds moving between cultures (Literte, 2010). Double consciousness has evolved to make sense of the experiences that Black men have at PWIs (DuBois, 1903). This concept has grown to encompass not only issues of diversity and culture, but also sexuality and the social contexts from whence these students are coming.

**Biculturalization.** Biculturalization is a theory that explores navigating the multiple cultures that are present when individuals are simultaneously enculturated and socialized in two different ways of life, such as when Black men at PWIs (Valentine, 1971). Biculturalization posits that a person can step out of one culture, place themselves in another culture, and transition between the two cultures (Valentine, 1971). Biculturalism is defined as entailing a set of psychological and interpersonal skills, such as code-switching, self-awareness, and cultural knowledge, and a biculturalized individual can effectively alternate between cultures while maintaining positive feelings toward both (Diemer, 2007; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Wei et al., 2010).



Source: de Anda, 1984

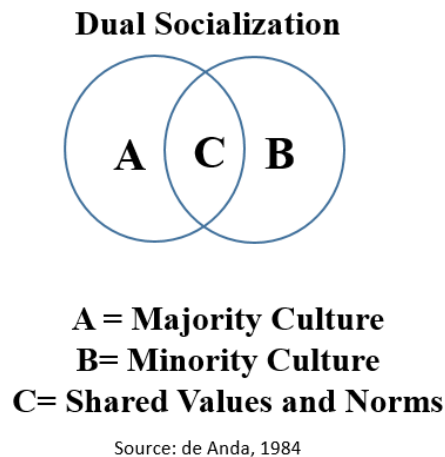
*Figure 1. A Representation of Biculturalization*

Studies have also shown that biculturalism has permitted Black men to maintain positive attitudes and connectedness to both cultures while keeping the two cultures distinct and separate (Diemer, 2007; LaFromboise et al., 1993). Bicultural competence consists of six areas: (1) knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, (2) positive attitudes

toward both majority and minority groups, (3) bicultural beliefs that establish that a person can live in both cultures while not compromising one's cultural identity, (4) communication ability, (5) having culturally appropriate behaviors in both cultures, and (6) a sense of being grounded (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Wei et al., 2010). LaFromboise et al. (1993) further argued that it is critical for a bicultural person's physiological wellbeing to be able to function within both cultures. For Black men, the ability to use this bicultural approach to negotiate both their previous culture and the predominantly White culture is beneficial for career development and full participation in the predominantly White culture (Diemer, 2007). Biculturalism is vital in understanding how Black men negotiate a predominantly White culture. However, it neglects to account for any overlap in values between the two cultures. Dual socialization thus takes the concept of biculturation a step further by considering that overlap.

**Dual socialization.** Dual socialization examines the overlap between two cultures, such as values that both the previous culture and the PWI culture share (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004). Dual socialization occurs when an individual can understand and accurately predict behavior in two cultural environments; such an individual who can adjust their behavior according to the norms of each culture depending upon the amount of overlap between the two cultures (De Anda, 1984). In examining dual socialization, De Anda's (1984) social work research identifies six aspects: (1) the degree of overlap of commonality between two cultures with regard to norms, values, beliefs, perceptions, and the like; (2) availability of cultural translators mediators and models; (3) the amount and type (positive or negative) of corrective feedback provided by each culture regarding attempts to produce normative behavior; (4) the conceptual style and problem-solving

approach of the minority individual and the mesh with the prevailing or valued styles of the majority culture; (5) the individuals' degree of bilingualism; and (6) the degree of dissimilarity in physical appearance from the majority culture such as skin color and facial features (De Anda, 1984).



*Figure 2.* A Representation of Dual Socialization

De Anda (1984) portends that converging the two worlds could allow individuals to function more effectively and less stressfully in both worlds. This claim goes beyond the concept of biculturalism, which merely suggests that the student or person can operate in each culture separately as long as the individual maintains their previous culture. However, in a college environment that contains values, conventions, and traditions that are alien to first-generation students, many of who are minorities, dual socialization does not occur naturally (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004).

Both biculturation and dual socialization contribute to Rodgers and Summers' (2008) discussion of Black students using a bicultural identity to navigate PWIs. To be



successful in PWI cultures, Black students must be able to demonstrate a bicultural competence (Harper, 2007b; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). While it is important for Black men to maneuver and navigate within a PWI culture, they must also retain and develop their Black identity, thereby developing a bicultural identity (Harper, 2007b; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Recent research recognizes the importance of Black students maintaining their cultural identity while acclimatizing to a PWI's culture, however the research fails to explore what it means for these students to develop a bicultural identity (Diemer, 2007; Harper & Kuh, 2007; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Wei et al., 2010). The previously discussed research addresses only independent cultures and cultures that overlap (De Anda, 1984; Valentine, 1971). None of the previous theories have attempted to discuss or explore a possible third culture that signifies transitional areas between each culture and the student finding their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Bhabha's (1994) third space theory addresses that gap in the current research.

**Third space theory.** Going beyond the concept of bicultural identity, the third space theory suggests another aspect of acculturation, which has been defined as the psychological and behavioral changes in individuals and groups that have long-term contact with another culture (Bhabha, 1994; Zea et al., 2003). In the present study, to move beyond existing research, the concept of the third space has been used to explore the hybrid cultural experiences that Black men experience at a PWI when finding their sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012).

Bhabha (1994) uses the third space theory to examine how a person can make sense of two different and distinct cultures, much as Black male students do when

attending a PWI (Bohr, 1994; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2011; Harper, 2013; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1997). The third space theory has been described and primarily used for research into literacy education. Bhabha's (1994) third space theory was initially developed to describe the experiences of people who have been colonized, namely the experiences of being caught in between an original culture and a new, unfamiliar culture (Bhabha, 1994). The colonized must continually negotiate and create new identities as a means of survival, which in turn creates a new hybrid culture or a third culture, and in some cases even a third language (Bhabha, 1994). Essential attributes of third space experiences include challenging assumptions, learning reciprocally, and creating new ideas, which emerge through negotiation and co-creation of identities, working languages, understandings, and relationships, and polyvocal (many-voiced) discussions across and through differences (Muller & Druin, 2010). Gutierrez (2008) also describes third space in the form of youth literacy as a place in which students begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond. Black men in higher education face a similar experience to the colonized that Bhabha refers to in his research. Black men must navigate a predominantly White culture that is often isolating, alienating, and uncomfortable (Bohr, 1994; Harper, 2006a; Terenzini et al., 1997). The use of Bhabha's (1994) third space theory as an application of Black male success is built upon Du Bois' (1903) idea of double consciousness. Little current research has discussed the hybrid culture, or the third culture, that is created based on the experiences of Black men at higher education institutions. Bhabha's concept provides an ideal framework to explore this subject. Furthermore, no research has used the third space theory to study the impact

in conjunction with the student creating a sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012).

### **Conceptual Framework**

In the present study, Bhabha's (1994) third space theory serves as the foundational model for understanding the experiences of Black men and their interactions at a PWI. Bhabha's (1994) third space was formulated initially to discuss what occurs when people encounter a dominant culture and how they make sense of their own culture concerning the dominant culture. However, this theory has never been applied to Black male students at predominantly White higher education institutions. The students' previously established culture has been explored using student persistence research centered specifically on Black men. This retention research provides the clearest picture yet of the hurdles that Black men face at PWIs.

**Third space and its application to Black men.** Black men navigating a PWIs campus community must retain and develop their Black identity while also developing a bicultural identity (Harper, 2007b; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Though recent research has recognized the importance of Black students both maintaining their cultural identity and acclimatizing to a PWIs culture, the research does not address the possibility of navigating transitional areas such as a third space to create their sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012, Tinto, 2006). One of the first concepts to explore the different worlds that Black men must straddle was Du Bois' (1903) double consciousness. Namely, Du Bois' (1903) double consciousness reflects the fact there are two different American cultures: the mainstream White culture and the Black culture made up of the ideas and practices that shape the daily lives of Black Americans

(Brannon, Markus, & Taylor, 2015). This assessment is true for Black men not only in American culture as a whole but also specifically at PWIs (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Based on Du Bois' (1903) double consciousness, research has indicated that Black students at PWIs must be socially and academically integrated into the campus community (Tinto, 2006). Research suggests that Black students must be able to demonstrate a bicultural competence to attain achievement at PWIs. Biculturation refers to the concept of Black men having to continually switch back and forth between the culture of the institution and their own culture (De Anda, 1984; Rodgers & Summers, 2008).

The concept of dual socialization takes the concept of biculturation and advances it one step further, highlighting that there can be overlap between the two cultures that a bicultural individual is experiencing (De Anda, 1984; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). The third space theory then goes yet another step further, offering an entirely new aspect of acculturation by addressing transitional areas and finding a sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). Bhabha's (1994) use of the third space enables an examination of how a person can exist between two cultures, both of which are productive and constraining in the individual's literary, social, and cultural practices (Moje et al., 2004). However, the third space framework, as defined by Bhabha (1994), has yet to be applied to Black men at PWIs. Black men attending PWIs have identified feelings of isolation, and discomfort because of the predominantly White culture established at so many higher education institutions (Cushman, 2007; Diemer, 2007; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). The third space theory offers an appropriate lens through which the present research can

explore the experiences these students and how they can navigate the multiple cultures they must contend with (Cushman, 2007; Diemer, 2007; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014).

Existing research has explored the experiences of Black men navigating PWIs with a focus on supportive peer groups, faculty and staff mentorship, and involvement in student leadership. However, a research gap exists concerning how Black men make use of a third space as a transitional area to creating their sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore Black men's experiences in developing the hybrid culture, or third culture, that is created when encountering a predominantly White institutional culture.

**Critical race theory as a lens.** Critical race theory (CRT) has been used as a conceptual lens in educational literature to express the importance of putting race at the center of research (Harper et al., 2009, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Taylor (2000) argues that racism is woven into the cultural fabric of most post-secondary educational institutions and that CRT is, therefore, a necessary part of any discussion surrounding them. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) support the appropriateness of using CRT as a lens for research and pairing it with qualitative methods such as narrative inquiry. This practice promotes listening to the experiences of Black men at PWIs; it thereby enables the exploration of counter-narratives that invite the voices of those who can speak firsthand about how they have been oppressed by race-based insults, prejudicial disadvantage, and discriminatory acts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

CRT puts the discussion of race and ethnicity at the center of what is being researched (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), and thus this theory is essential for the present research. CRT was first discussed in the 1970s when lawyers, activists, and legal scholars around the country began to realize that the achievements of the civil rights era were being rolled back (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). One foundational tenet of CRT is that racism is ordinary and part of the usual way in which society does business. CRT contends that the structures that oppress must be deconstructed, the value of every human being must be considered in the reconstruction, and society should promote the value of all involved possessing equal power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). More recently, CRT has been used in higher education institutions that have recognized the need to hear and listen to the experiences of their underrepresented students (Hall, 2017).

Using CRT with qualitative methods has proven to be successful in exploring the experiences of Black men at these institutions (Harper et al., 2011). It introduces narratives to voices that are not often heard at PWIs (Harper et al., 2011). CRT was used in Harper et al.'s (2011) study, which examined the experiences of Black resident assistants at a PWI. In the study, using CRT exposed how differently Black men experienced the resident assistant position (Harper et al., 2011). CRT as a lens for qualitative research has yielded positive results in telling the experiences of Black men in higher education institutions.

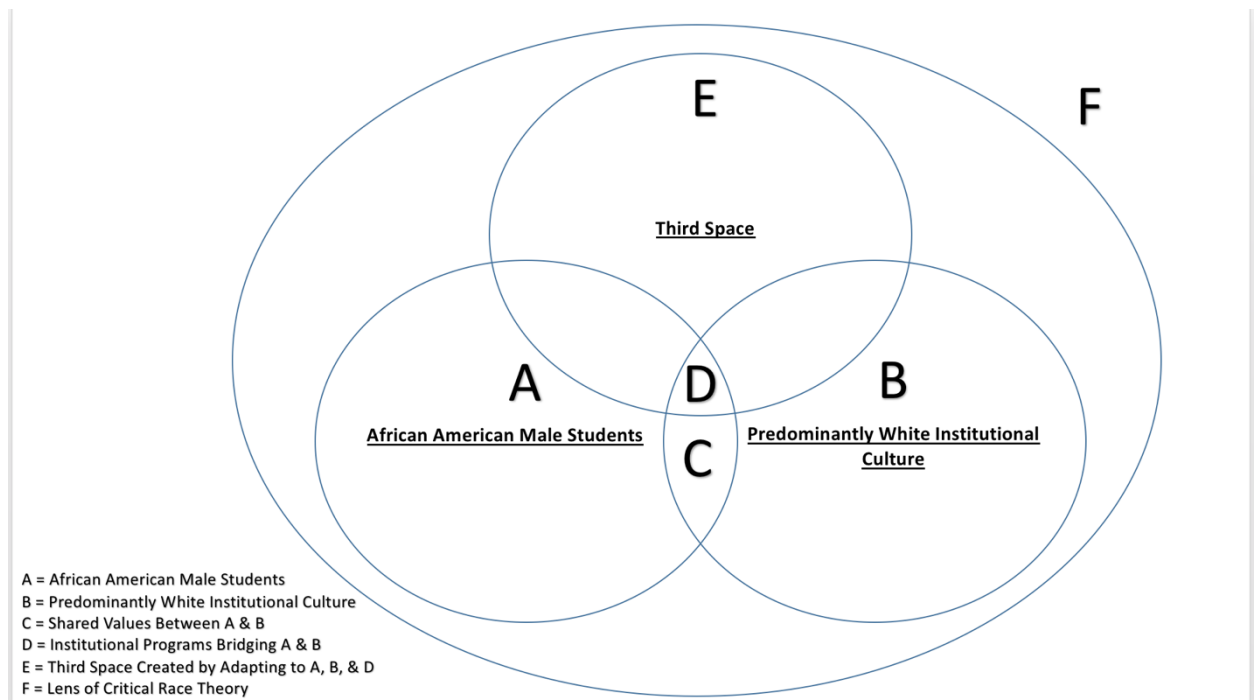


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 3 illustrates how the third space theory can be used to explain another way that Black men can persist at PWIs. Sections A and B represent the juxtaposed cultures of the student's original culture and the culture of the PWI. Section C represents the small overlap between the students' culture and the institution's culture, where there may be opportunities for the students to connect with the institution. Ultimately, though, Section C alone will be insufficient for the students to feel a sense of belonging at the institution. Sections A, B, and C each independently represent the students experiences making sense of their previous culture and the culture of the PWI. However, Section D develops when the institution recognizes a need to provide intentional opportunities with peer groups, faculty, and staff. Section E signifies students' ability to create a third space and find

their sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). Section F represents the lens of CRT that puts race and the lived experiences at the center of research, recognizing that the experiences of Black men are central to the study (Cerezo et al., 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Black men's marginalization in higher education has occurred since its founding. Today, higher education institutions struggle to retain Black men. Research involving persistence, campus climate, and CRT as a lens has continuously affirmed that higher education institutions are providing inadequate support to Black men, who struggle to understand the PWIs' culture, a culture that was not created with them in mind (Cushman, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Diemer, 2007; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). Higher education institutions must allow for and provide resources that support Black male student retention (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004). Understanding double consciousness, biculturalization, and dual socialization and applying that understanding to Bhabha's (1994) third space can allow these students to maintain their cultural heritage while creating a hybrid culture that recognizes the importance of their previous connections to family and friends but allows them to grow at higher education institutions (DuBois, 1903; DeAnda, 1984). It also must be stated, that understanding how Black men use the in-between spaces, or transitional areas, described in third space, to find their sense of belonging is a critical factor in understanding their retention at a PWI (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012).



## Chapter 3

### Methodology

PWIs have long been places where racism and isolation have been the experiences for Black men (Cushman, 2007; Diemer, 2007; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). Due to the White culture that dominates many higher education institutions at PWIs, social networks and vital support structures do not exist for Black men which threaten their success. However, no research has explored the concepts of double consciousness and the creation of a third space as a potential contribution to that persistence (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). By providing and giving credence to their voices and experiences, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of Black men living, learning, and operating in the modern higher education institutional culture. To further understand the experiences of Black men in these specific institutional cultures and the role of Bhabha's (1994) third space in their experiences, the following research questions are explored:

1. How do Black men describe their experience at Forman University?
2. How does the previous culture of Black males impact their current collegiate experiences and persistence?
3. How do Black men make sense of their previous culture in conjunction with the predominantly White culture of their current institution?
4. How does third space theory help to explain the intersections of race and gender at Forman University?

The purpose of this study, using narrative inquiry, is to explore the experiences of Black men creating third spaces at PWIs. This methodology chapter provides insight into

the design and implementation of the research that has been conducted. This study used a narrative analysis, relying on semi-structured interviews and a focus group (Clandinin, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2015). This chapter discusses the rationale for the structure and design, setting, sampling, procedures, participant data collection process, and analysis of the data collected.

### **Context and Setting**

This study took place at Forman University which is a pseudonym for a liberal arts University on the east coast of the United States. The significance of the research lies in its effort to understand Black male experiences in a challenging institutional environment and the reasons why Black men persist, including the creation of a third space (Bohr, 1994; Harper, 2009a; Harper et al., 2011; Harper, 2013; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1997). Forman University is a mid-sized, northeastern, public university. Forman's education has a liberal arts foundation; half of its curriculum is general studies in the liberal arts, and the institution is made up of seven academic schools of study (Stockton, 2019b). As of the Fall 2017 semester, Forman had 8,275 undergraduate students. As of 2016, Forman's student enrollment was 69.3% White, 13.5% Hispanic/Latino, 5.4% Black, and 6.7% Asian (Stockton, 2016). Forman University is approaching the 50<sup>th</sup> year of existence which is very young compared to some of the longer established universities.

### **Research Design**

Narrative inquiry focuses on what is said, written, or visually shown as a part of the research (Riessman, 2007). Native inquiry has also been described as honoring lived experiences as a source of valuable knowledge and understanding which also supports the

concept of CRT and centering the voices of the marginalized students at the heart of the study (Clandinin, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Qualitative methods have been used frequently and successfully in the study of Black men in higher education (Gurin & Gurin, 2002; Harper & Kuh, 2007; Harper et al., 2009). The present study aims to explore the lived experiences of Black men creating third spaces at a PWI. According to purpose, the research questions, and the use of CRT, narrative inquiry is best suited for this research. Narrative inquiry has been described as:

A collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquiry enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving, and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.20)

More specifically, narrative inquiry seeks descriptions of how the student experiences the world in terms of social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Clandinin, 2016).

Understanding individuals' lived experience addresses what it means to live in relational ways, ways that allow us to understand our own and other's experiences through narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016). Narrative inquiry is appropriate for the present study because it is essential to explore the experiences of Black men at a PWI (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2016; Riessman, 2007). Research has shown that Black men who attend PWIs not only have experienced the coldness of a PWI

culture but also have marginalized voices on campus (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Gasman, 2009; Harper, 2006a, 2008, 2009b, 2012a; Terenzini et al., 1997). Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to explore the experiences of Black men at Forman University and their use of a third space as a transitional area to find their sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2016; Riessman, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Understanding my world view of research and how research is collected provides an essential lens from which to view the present study. My world view as a researcher is social constructivism, which seeks to understand the world in which we operate (Creswell, 2013). Based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), social constructivism provides an appropriate framework for understanding that learning is cultural, not just internal or individualistic (Harper, K., 2005). Using the lens of CRT further bolsters this worldview by recognizing that race is central to understanding the experiences of Black men in colleges and universities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This world view is appropriate for narrative analysis because it gathered the lived experiences of students and attempts to make meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2016; Riessman, 2007).

i Additionally, it is important to provide background on myself as the researcher, especially considering that I am a White male researching the lived experiences of Black male students. Critics may challenge my research due to my experiences as a White male, arguing that my White privilege prevents me from genuinely relating to Black male students (Rankin & Reason, 2005). In other words, I expect to face the criticism that I

could never fully understand or even immerse myself in the lives and stories of Black men and thus could never fully grasp or understand the qualitative data. However, as Theoharis (2007) states, “as a White male leader for social justice” doing research, his research and experience were “driven by the belief, held widely by critical theorists, that my work should benefit those who are marginalized in the society and that the current way society is organized is unjust” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Indeed, throughout my 15 years in higher education and my experiences working with Black men inside and outside of higher education, I have held that it is the responsibility of higher education administrators to support, encourage, and mentor students. As a young professional, I often felt that I would never be able to develop the same connections with Black male students that Black administrators could.

Over time I have come to realize that I do not need to have the same relationship in order to be supportive of Black male students or engage with them about their experiences. Being comfortable about who I am as a White male freed me to be authentic with Black men and support their efforts to be successful in their academic and personal pursuits. While Black male students may not speak with me in the same way they would with a Black administrator, the relationships I have created have been authentic. I would challenge those who question my ability to research the lives of Black men to consult any of the current or past students I have worked with and to inquire about the relationships that I have established with them.

Moreover, the majority of existing research concerning Black men concludes with a general statement that higher education administrators need to be more aware of the research concerning Black men. That concluding thought in most research is a call to

action that I am committing to. As a higher education administrator, I consider it my duty to be supportive of students; if Black male students need support based on culture and an institution that does not value their voice, I want to be able to share their experiences and voice in any way possible. My hope for this research is that it will provide another point of view to understand the lived experiences of Black men thus aiding in their success.

### **Sampling and Participants**

Criterion sampling was chosen for this study based on studying Black male student experiences at a PWI. The first was criterion sampling, which has been defined as establishing set criteria and then finding individuals who fit within those established conditions (Creswell, 2013). Based on the topic of study, criterion sampling was the most appropriate. It was also an applicable sampling method because of the lack of diversity at Forman University, a predominantly White university, where there are more White students attending than at any other higher education institution in the state (Stockton University, 2016). Criterion sampling ensured that the Black males were selected for the study, to ensure that their voices remain at the center of the research (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Another criterion for this study was that participants had to have a grade point average higher than a 2.75 to demonstrate that they are academically successful. This criterion ensured that the students who participated had experience with the campus culture at a PWI. In the fall of 2018, the Dean of Students was solicited to identify students who could participate in this study based on the criteria that were determined (Harper, 2004). To gather a significant amount of data, I interviewed seven students. The student's identities are protected by pseudonyms, and the students' consent was gained before they participated in the research. Before any data collection or student contact,

approval was obtained from Rowan University and Forman University's institutional review board (I.R.B.). Table 1 provides information about the seven interview participants of this study.

Table 1.

*Participants*

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Major	GPA
Brian	Black	21	Male	Biology	3.86
Howard	Black	21	Male	Business	3.31
Jamal	Black	18	Male	Health Sciences	3.21
Kenny	Black	21	Male	Communications	2.88
Oliver	Black	19	Male	Business	3.03
Phillip	Black	26	Male	Communications	3.25
Sebastian	Black	20	Male	Communications	3.16

**Data Collection**

Narrative inquiry centers around understanding and making meaning of lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2016). To better understand those experiences, multiple in-depth interviews can be conducted which is consistent with narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2016). Using narrative inquiry as a methodology in-depth, multiple, semi-structured interviews were used to gather field texts from seven Black male students attending Forman University (Clandinin, 2016).

This type of methodology and data collection permits the researcher to listen to the students to tell their stories, but also live alongside them as they lived and retold their experiences (Clandinin, 2016). The interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. The field texts were then transcribed to become intimately familiar with the qualitative data the students had provided. Using narrative inquiry permitted the students to tell stories and experiences they may have never told anyone, thus providing authenticity to this research. Using qualitative methods to gather field texts about the experiences of Black men at PWIs has been shown to be a successful for yielding rich data (Bonner, 2001; Harper et al., 2011; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper, 2007b; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009). In Harper and Quaye's (2007) study, qualitative methods proved particularly successful in examining student organizations as venues for identity expression and development among Black male student leaders. Through interviews, the researchers found that predominantly Black and minority student organizations were an important place where Black men felt comfortable and safe participating and becoming student leaders (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Interview questions using this methodology should invite the interviewee to give rich descriptions of events (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). When designing the interview protocol, the following aspects were considered: location, interview length, number of interviews, and questions in a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews have also been an essential tool in gathering data about the experiences of Black men in higher education (Clandinin, 2016; Moustakas, 1994; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Smith, 2015). In Museus and Quaye's (2009) research, the 30 semi-structured interviews that were conducted were explaining an intercultural perspective of racial minority college student



persistence. Their research demonstrated that qualitative methods provided a voice to students who are often marginalized and illustrated their experiences in being successful at a PWI (Museus & Quaye, 2009).

Based on previous research, which illustrates the importance of the setting of the interviews as well, the interviews in the present study were conducted at Forman University in an office. This private, one-on-one setting provided a comfortable space that encouraged openness and honesty. A three-tiered interview protocol was established. Two interviews were conducted that each lasted between 45 minutes to 60 minutes, which allowed a rapport to be built with the students. The first interview explored the student's previous cultural experiences before attending Forman University and events at Forman University and inquired as to how the student had navigated the institution's predominantly White culture. As the interviews were semi-structured, ten questions were prepared. However, the researcher and the students would often ask additional questions based upon which stories and experiences the students felt were most important (Clandinin, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Specifically, in the second interview, the concept of a third space was explored using the field texts that had been generated from the first interview. Again, as the interviews were semi-structured interviews, ten questions were developed to provide a framework for the discussion. These questions served as a foundation from which to explore other areas that arose during the interview (Clandinin, 2016; Smith, 2015). After both of the first two interviews were conducted, the third tier of the protocol was a focus group. The focus group questions were used to follow up on emerging themes that were present in the previous two interviews.

The semi-structured focus group allowed the participants the opportunity to share any additional thoughts, and respond to the other student's stories and experiences. The focus group was held in a private office. Creswell (2013) recommends that focus groups follow interviews, as some participants may feel more comfortable sharing information in a group setting versus in a one-on-one interview. As all the men participating in this study have experienced attending Forman University, it was appropriate to use a focus group to gather rich descriptions of their experiences in that setting. In Brown's (2006) study, focus groups were used to gather data on what factors outside of classroom experiences had impacted the Black male participants the most. Brown (2006) found that student governments, athletics, peers, and staff mentorship were the most impactful activities for Black men. Using focus groups also proved vital in Brown's (2006) ability to determine the high-impact practices of these students outside of the classroom. In the present study, after the focus group took place, the field texts were transcribed.

### **Analysis**

An accepted method of analyzing field texts has been thematic analysis (TA). TA is suited to a wide range of narrative texts and can be applied to stories that develop in interview conversations and group meetings (Riessman, 2007). TA also allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This approach to analysis identifies what is common in the experiences of the participants and then the researcher must identify the commonalities that appear in the multiple field texts (Braun & Clarke, 2012). An inductive approach to analyzing the field texts was used, which allowed the themes to come from the stories and experiences of the students (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

It is essential when using an inductive approach that semi-structured interviews also be used because it allows the student to retell their stories and experiences based upon what is important to them. Semi-structured interviews again permit the student's voice to be at the center of the research which is not only consistent with narrative inquiry, and TA, but also with CRT. Using TA does utilize pre-existing research as resources when analyzing the experiences of students in this study (Riessman, 2007). Once the interviews and focus group were conducted, each interview including the focus group was transcribed and analyzed in its original format (Braun & Clarke, 2012). However, once it was analyzed, the interviews were cleaned up and made readable for the study (Riessman, 2007).

A six-phased approach was used for thematic analysis in this research. The six phases of thematic analysis are (1) familiarising yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Each phase will be discussed in detail to illustrate the analysis of the field texts from the students. The first phase of TA becomes familiar with the field texts that were collected from the interviews and focus group. Except for the focus group, all of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. This permitted the researcher to listen to the audio of the interview and become intimately familiar with the experiences and stories of these students. Braun and Clarke (2012) recommended reading through the field texts multiple times and to begin to think about ideas that may become relevant to the research questions that were established for the research.

The second phase is to generate initial codes based upon multiple reviews of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Codes have been referred to as the building blocks analysis and can begin to provide a summary of the field texts (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Codes are short and succinct and permit the researcher to mark areas of the text that may still be unclear as to the importance of the experience for the student (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The object of coding is to capture both the diversity and the patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Each field text was reviewed, and the codes were developed based upon the varying experience of the students. The analysis of this study generated 24 individual codes as the researcher reviewed the multiple interviews and focus group field texts.

The third phase is searching for themes which shifts the researcher from coding to taking a broader look at what overall theme may be generated (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A theme is described as capturing something important about the field texts about the research question, and the theme represents some level of patterned response of meaning within the field texts (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Table 2 represents a thematic map that was created consisting of three main themes and three sub-themes that fall under each central theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The fourth phase represents reviewing potential themes about the coded data and the entirety of the field texts (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This also involves asking questions about whether a theme is an actual theme, or is it just a code, other questions that should be asked in this phase, are, is this a quality theme that can be used about the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012)? It is recommended that once the themes have been established that they are again reviewed with consideration for the entirety of the

field texts to be confident that they are the most critical points conveyed in the participant's experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The fifth phase is defining and naming themes, so it is evident in the research what is unique and specific about each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This involves referring back to the field texts to determine which excerpts would be most appropriate to support and provide clarity to each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Extracts of the field text also tell the story of each participant and permit their voice to be at the center of the research which is also the focus of CRT (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2012) also suggest that the research is presented in descriptive excerpts. They also suggest that the field texts be presented conceptually and interpretatively which is the voice of the researcher making meaning of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The sixth and final phase is producing the report or in this case writing a dissertation that takes into accounts the phases of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2012). TA should allow the voices of the participants to be at the center of the research and provide a clear narrative about their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Clandinin, 2016). When putting the themes in order, they should connect logically and be easy for the reader to understand (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2012) advocate for using these phases to create a TA that is thorough, plausible, and sophisticated. While not mentioned in the six phases by Braun and Clarke (2012) it was important to share the participant's experiences in the form of narratives to capture the entirety of their experiences at Forman University. Narratives provide a richer description of the participant's experiences and allow for a greater sense of rapport with the participants. The tenants of

TA more closely aligned with the goals of this research and was utilized as a qualitative method of analysis. While traditional methods use frequency and other measures to make meaning of experiences TA ensures the experiences of each participant are taken into consideration (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Clandinin, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Riessman, 2007). Detailed narratives were especially crucial due to the use of CRT (counter-storytelling) as a way to ensure marginalized voices at Forman University were heard (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

A significant amount of research has been dedicated to the study of Black men in higher education because of the failure of higher education institutions to retain and graduate these students (Bonner, 2001; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Brown, 2006; Catching, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006; Diemer, 2007; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper, 2007a, 2007b, 2009a, 2012a; Harper et al., 2011; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper et al., 2009; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Hughes & Bonner II, 2006; Ingram et al., 2016; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Palmer et al., 2011a, 2011b; Pope & Cuyjet, 2006; Schuh, Jones, & Harper, 2011; Strayhorn, 2014). Very early in the 1900s, Du Bois (1903) first described the double consciousness that Black Americans must navigate. That theory further developed into biculturalism and a combination of CRT to explain the experiences that Black men have at predominantly White higher education institutions (Bohr, 1994; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Diemer, 2007; Guiffida & Douthit, 2010; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper, 2009b, 2013; Harper et al., 2011; Melendez, 2008; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011b; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). These students must continuously make sense of their previous cultural

experiences and the campus climate of PWIs (Bohr, 1994; Diemer, 2007; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b; Melendez, 2008; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). Working with Black men to explore their shared experiences at Forman University has provided more vibrant and more precise descriptions of their experiences in multiple cultures. Using the narrative inquiry has allowed the Black men at Forman University to provide rich narratives detailing their experiences in living in two very different cultures. Never before has the discussion of biculturalism of Black men addressed the creation of a third space, or transitional area that aids them in creating a sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012) in a higher education setting. In this research, however, Bhabha's (1994) use of the third space theory moves the discussion past biculturalism toward a better understanding of the experiences of Black men at a PWI. As the following chapters demonstrate, using the narratives and experiences of these students has brought to light many valuable experiences that are often marginalized.

## Chapter 4

### Participants Narratives

Narrative inquiries are filled with the detailed, and rich narrative accounts as they represented the lived and told experiences of participants and researchers as they engaged together during the inquiry (Clandinin, 2016). The experience of the participants, or in this case the students is the center of the research which is in alignment with CRT ensuring that the marginalized voices in society and education are heard and put at the center of the research (Clandinin, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). There a variety of analysis a researcher can use when analyzing qualitative data and for this study, TA was used using Braun and Clarke's (2012), six phases. While providing participant narratives was not a part of Braun and Clarke's (2012) six phases, it was important that the student's experiences in total be understood as a narrative.

This ensured that the entire student experience could be interpreted as a narrative focusing on three categories, pre-college experiences, initial college experiences, and their current college experiences. The literature has shown the Black men at PWIs often faces, isolation, loneliness, and an unfamiliarity with the culture of the college or university they are attending (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, S. R. et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b; Harper, 2013; Strayhorn, 2014). This research hopes to understand how the students initially navigated, coped, and flourished in the PWI culture. In order to preserve the voice of the participants, their experiences were expressed in narrative form. Each narrative describes a participant and their journey which is the essence of narrative inquiry and CRT (Clandinin, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). A short biographical description of the participants will be provided as background to frame their experiences.



Included in the narrative, will be descriptions that provide context and act as transitions or observations of the participant. Criterion sampling ensured that academically successful Black men with a GPA of 2.75 or higher were chosen for this study (Creswell, 2013). As previously described, the participant's identities were protected using pseudonyms that were either chosen by the participants or assigned by the researcher. The seven men identified themselves as Black men attending Forman University, and they have been identified as Brian, Jamal, Howard, Kenny, Oliver, Phillip, and Sebastian. This research aims to provide a voice for Black men at a PWI to better understand their experiences.

**Brian.** Brian is a 21-year-old Black male, with a 3.86-grade point average attending Forman University, he was born in West Africa but moved to the United States when he was younger and has grown up attending the local school system. Brian is currently a commuter student, and his academic major is biology. Brian's K-12 experiences occurred locally, about 20 minutes from where Forman University is located. He had an interest in the sciences before a negative experience, that led him to pursue sports and athletics instead of his passion for the sciences. Brian transferred to Forman from a previous public four-year state university, where he was involved in collegiate athletics, and described that he was not doing well due to not being focused on his academics. Brian currently has a job off campus and does participate in model united nations and a men of color affinity group called Sankofa. Brian had a variety of experiences before attending Forman. However, one of the most critical experiences he shared was his passion for the sciences and how he often felt isolated being the only Black male or student of color in the classroom. Brian initially described a negative

experience he had in middle school that led him away from his passion of studying science.

*Brian's had many realizations throughout the interview, especially unpacking an experience that he determined affected his grades in high school and at his first college. Brian is very self-aware and very plainly recognizes that being a biology major is an isolating experience, but for much of Brian's life he has been isolated due to race, so throughout the interview, he does not express sadness. Brian struggles to stay involved at Forman, but also work and do well in school, but has also grown significantly, recognizing that he is able to set the priorities in his life to make him most successful.*

***Pre-college experiences.*** I just like the history of science and it was kind of different from everything, and I thought it was cool and I decided to try it. I learned about some of the other things that you can do with a career in science once you get out of college and it drew me in, and I liked it. I started in this program, and it was called the medical science academy. I was doing great my first year. I had a 4.0, and everything was going perfect, then, oddly enough other kids thought it was so funny to make racial jokes. I was the only black guy in the class, and I was used to it at this point, but it just got me so mad. Somebody said a word that I am not going to repeat. I got out of character and got in a fight.

I just realized that is actually last time I was got in a fight and I realized that I was being the stereotypical angry Black man. After that my academic performance drastically fell. I just didn't want to try as hard and I felt I didn't belong, so I put a lot of my energy into playing sports. I remember senior year I just didn't do any schoolwork and I just became a big sports guy. In high school at the end of the day I would go to football

practice or when I went back to my neighborhood there were people around that looked like me and it felt like code switching but I still felt that I belonged in both communities.

*Brian at this moment in the interview, had realized that his passion for science was turned off by this experience and that he gravitated to sports where he felt more accepted and comfortable. Brian had an epiphany recalling this early memory but appreciated the experience. Brian then began to describe his experiences at Walter Paul University (WPU) prior to attending Forman and describing the diversity of WPU.*

I transferred and didn't start at Forman originally. I went to Walter Paul which is a very different from Forman. WPU has a much larger black population. I was playing football and didn't have enough time for anything. Being a science major and a football player did not mix. Playing football and trying to balance the biology major was rough. On average, I ate, and I slept three hours a night. I was playing sports and there's a lot that comes with the sport besides being on the field. There's a social aspect that comes with playing a sport that I got drawn into. I didn't learn about boundaries and was just being a part of the team and wasn't thinking about what's best for me. I didn't have any time to sit and reflect. Not until after my first semester grades. I didn't have time to sit and think that maybe I do not want to hang out with these guys and instead I should go to the library.

*In this next section, Brian was able at this point in the conversation to also realize that while he felt most comfortable in sports, however, the culture of sports negatively impacted his academics. He realized that he had to make a change and decided to transfer to Forman. Brian went on to describe how educationally he has always felt isolated.*

*Initial college experiences.* I came here and it was a culture shock. I do not live on campus, so I already feel isolated. I'm still connected with my family, but I think I lost a lot of friends in the process trying to get my stuff in order. I feel like I lost a lot. I've always been in science classes and I was always the only Black kid my class and it wasn't a big deal, so I've always been secluded. It's not like it's going didn't really hurt me or anything, but it was just different to see that like you could go anywhere and still feel like you know...

*Brian speaks very matter of fact about his isolation and loneliness and continues to describe it through his experience. When speaking his loneliness does not come off as a sad aspect of his experience, it is more or less of something he just knows he needs to deal with on a daily basis. Brian then went into more detail describing his initial experiences at Forman.*

Walter Paul had a larger black population and was much more diverse. At the same time, I did better here than I did there. I don't know if the isolation forces me to work harder or, but it's worked out that way. I got lucky on my registration date and ran into a couple of professors. They were really helpful and offered me advice from the moment I stepped on campus. I had the mindset that this was going to be a fresh start and I was going to make the best of this opportunity. I had professors that were really helpful. Dean Davis and others made me feel like I could do what I want to do with this clean sheet. Being able to talk and lay out a vision of where I wanted to be was instrumental for me. When I left Walter Paul, I wasn't doing well. So obviously the first couple of semesters at Forman were actually pretty easy because I wasn't playing football and did

not have to balance football and biology. Coming here I had a lot more free time and I was good.

*While Brian did acknowledge his isolation, he did express a relieve to be at Forman because he has been able to focus on his academics without having the responsibilities of being on the football team. While his initial college experiences seemed easier in some sense, he expressed challenges with the Current PWI experience related to finding a community for him, and a sense of guilt for not being more involved in the campus community.*

**Current college experiences.** I didn't really know much about Sankofa. And as time went along, I learned more about it and got involved. I met some people and it felt like a little bit like a community. I've only been here for like maybe like a year and a half. Sankofa is the first time I was involved and seeing people that look like me on campus was really nice. I was great to speak in front of the Atlantic City kids that came, and I knew a couple of them was cool. That was during my first semester and in that moment, I felt like it helped me a lot in the adjustment process by providing a sense of leadership. It made me feel like I was on the right track. I did model U.N., which was a good adjustment, I liked it.

*This was the first time Brian described his experiences and looked at ease in describing the positive connections he had made with other students. However, Brian shares that he struggles to find a balance between work, clubs and organizations, and his academic responsibilities.*

I was working at Olive Garden and now I work in a health care office. I just do the paperwork and the front desk. Navigating through school and work is rough, and it is

not easy. I had to set goals for myself and then just go and get it. I mean there's really no other way to play it. I have a test in organic chemistry, I got this, and I have to get to work at 5 pm and it feels like everything is coming at me. I've been a part of Sankofa, being on the advisory board and it feels like I should take more time out of my day to help mentor people that are coming in. They may be in a worst situation than I was when I came here, and it feels like I don't do enough but it is something I think about. But then at the same time if I do too much socially then I'm not doing enough academically and it's like throwing both things out the window.

*Brian expressed that the odds are against him as a Black male, commuter, science student and expressed a general feeling of luck that he has succeeded to this point.*

I have redefined my priorities. It's really odd because I feel like I have been very lucky. I feel like in any other situation with me being isolated and being back in the community I was in during high school I should not have succeeded but I just got lucky and I just kept going forward just became a little bit more focused person. I realized that I am the captain of my own ship and I have control of my life. It is important to figure out who you are. If you're going to be uncomfortable everyday make it for a reason. All this stuff I am doing and putting myself through needs to be for a reason otherwise there is no point to go through this and just be mediocre, it would be such a waste of time.

*Brian began to focus on how he does not really know what community he falls into. Again, Brian does not show any sadness but describes the simple fact that he really does not fit into any community and has not found his place yet.*

I'm in between all the communities, not quite African enough to be African. I'm not quite Black enough to be Black compared to my counterparts who didn't go to

college and I'm not quite White enough to be part of the PWI community. So, in a sense, I feel like it was just always important to make sure I never lost the parts of my culture I was brought up with. It's important to keep the essence of who you are as you grow and not lose those parts of you. I'm still the same person in terms from my West African family so I have that strong culture and I still listen to that music and am very much connected to that community, but I definitely lost a lot when I came here, because I had to adapt. Sometimes I go to my African church to stay connected to the community as much as I can.

*The biology program at Forman has had a profound impact on his experiences at Forman. Brian shared how he feels as though people judge him based upon his race until he participates in the class, then other students recognize his academic talents. The conversation shifted and Brian spoke about in his perfect world and how he imagined how his three identities could come together.*

Every day I feel isolated, in my science classes until I start answering questions and people see that I'm not a dead fish, I mean that's the only time I feel like okay maybe I like it. I'm just like anybody else I understand the stuff. In my perfect world I mean I'd like to see more people look like me in the science field. I understand that's not always going to be the case. Maybe I can change that. Maybe I need to recognize race is not a boundary. In the science community there needs to be more acceptance and there are a lot more commonalities than there are differences and maybe race can be minute in the grand scheme. In that general area as an African-American that one really hurts me and a lot. I guess I've never taken the time to think about it. I don't know...

*Based on Brian's experiences, the one that hurts him the most is the preconceived notions he feels during his science classes where he is often the only student of color and feels as though, others judge him as not being as smart as others. Brian's passion to be successful in the sciences is evident in his drive to be successful academically.*

**Jamal.** Jamal is an 18-year-old Black male, who came to Forman University as a first-time freshman, lives on campus, and grew up in southern New Jersey. He attended a summer program prior to attending Forman called the educational opportunity fund (EOF) which prepares students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to attend colleges or universities with financial support and continued advising from specialized faculty and staff. Jamal is in a cohort of students who are the first to attend the Atlantic City, EOF program. Jamal has a 3.21-grade point average and is pursuing a degree in marine sciences with an interest in oceanography, photography, and traveling.

*Jamal has a very positive outlook on life and realizes that while he is often one of the only students of color in his classes, he needs to set an example to show them that he belongs in those classes. Jamal also was very fortunate to be part of a group of Black students to form a group through social media that translated into a support group during his first weeks and semesters at Forman. Another important aspect of Jamal's experience was the great wealth of diversity he found in EOF, and while the summer program only lasted five weeks, he relished the experiences in learning about other students' cultures.*

*In this next section, Jamal expressed that coming from a big family is a foundational piece of his life. He also expressed moving to another town was a difficult*



*transition especially entering high school. At that point in his life, he expressed being alone was preferred to making new friends at his high school.*

***Pre-college experiences.*** So, in middle school I played soccer and that was most of my day. Then I would do homework and chores, keeping myself busy cooking, playing video games. My family and I would just sit down and watch a movie and it would never go as planned as there are six people at home. With a house of six nothing ever goes as planned. It was me, my mom, and my five sisters because I am the only guy. The youngest she is six and the oldest my younger sister she's 15. So, I'm 18. I am second oldest, my sister she's 27. She moved out and she lives in Delaware, she's living on her own.

I was very reserved in high school because that area was different from my old area, so I didn't have a lot of friends, and I was very isolated. The surroundings were different, and it was a totally different environment. I lived at my old home for 10 years. Then when I started high school we moved. But my first home is definitely my home, 100%. After we moved, I did not want to start over, I didn't want to I don't want change.

*Jamal then began to explain how important his mother has been in his life. Jamal indicates throughout his experiences the vital role his mother plays in his life teaching him to cook and providing advice to guide him through his college experience.*

My mom has taught me everything I know about cooking. So back home my mom always cooks, and we help her. So, growing up I helped my mom cook. This allowed me to learn how to cook along with my, so I've been cooking for a long time. Because of her I know how to survive and be on my own. She's a stay at home mom so she's constantly raising my younger siblings and that is so hard. That's a hard job without

getting paid. She was a housekeeper before. So, she is always busy caring. That's her specialty. She's a caregiver. She cares a lot. She's a big role model in the household.

*Jamal also explained how he was able to become friends with other new students prior to attending Forman through social media.*

So, before EOF before I even got to college there was this event. It was a day to represent the school you were going to go to and post it on social media. I posted my tweets on Instagram and this girl direct messaged me from the same area I lived in and told me she was going to Forman too. So, she said, “Hey do you mind being in this group chat we're making a Black people that go to Forman. So, they'll be around each other when the semester starts. Mind if I get your number?” and I said “sure, fine, whatever”. So, I was in a group chat, and they were trying to recruit more people in the group chat. Eventually, we could not add any more people because there were so many.

*Jamal also shared how he had made a connection with a staff member at Forman prior to even attending the institution, and why that was important to him.*

When I first came here and Luke Walters was definitely one of the staff that helped me before I even got here. He told me that he could get me into Forman. He came through and helped me and told me how everything worked. He was the one that really helped me, that was a blessing in disguise. I appreciate him for helping me at Forman before I got here too.

*A great many of Jamal's experiences from his initial days at Forman are memories of attending the EOF program and seeing a large amount of diversity in that group. However, Jamal explains that after EOF, the lack of diversity he saw at the university was shocking, but he had groups such as his friends before college and his*

*EOF advisors, staff, faculty, and friends to lean on for support. Jamal also articulated his love and appreciation for the EOF program in not only preparing him for college, but for the diversity of the other students in the program.*

***Initial college experiences.*** There was a lot of diversity in EOF and I miss it even though I hated, at the same time. Even though I hated waking up. I miss it because there was a lot of diversity. Angel the Associate Director of EOF said Forman will not be as diverse after this program. There will be very few minorities in your class, and he was right that's what I saw. There were people from Atlantic City, North Jersey, and all over, so EOF was very diverse. EOF was fun because it was a lot of Spanish people and people of color. So, when we all came together it was amazing. We had a lot of fun teaching each other about our culture and being able to learn about other people's cultures.

I had to fix time management and I had to work on that because I would stay up late even though I knew I had to be up at 7am. I am good at that now. Diversity and time management were two things that EOF really taught me, they really helped me with that. I also learned how to study because I didn't take that seriously before I left high school. EOF is a big part of my Forman career. The diversity in EOF is what I remember most because I got to experience so many cultures other than my own.

*Jamal then began to describe how isolated he felt in his oceanography class and his perspective on being one of the few Black students in this class.*

I was walking to my oceanography class on my first day. There was a there was a lot of White people and it was me and this other girl. She was Black too. So, when I sat down, I just got stares and I'm like okay. Like I couldn't, you know, I didn't make it

awkward staring back. So, I just ignored it and I paid attention to the teacher who I met with before class started. I met with her before the fall semester and we had a talk about taking classes for marine biology and marine science. Even though I had this relationship with this semester I thought should I take this class?

Then I said to myself no, I think when you are different you need to set an example to show who you are. That is what my mom taught me. My mom taught how to handle situations like this. So definitely setting examples because I might be one of the only minorities. I need to show what I can do and prove that I can do just as good as you can. So definitely set an example in that class. There is a lot of prejudice before you actually get to engage in the work. You know it's a lot of misconceptions, but I wasn't going to let it stop me from asking questions and it didn't stop me from completing the work. It is all up to you if you want to pursue it or fallback because of what people think of you. So that's how I see it.

*Even though Jamal has encountered feelings of isolation, with the guidance of his mother and his self-determination he continues to pursue his personal goals and aspirations. Socially, Jamal describes a variety of experiences which has assisted him to navigating the PWI culture, but also described negative experiences that have negatively impacted his friends.*

So, the first day I was trying to find my friends I made through social media, but I had to get used my classes and everything. So, I didn't meet them the first week but later on in the second semester we had a big party together. We even celebrated one of my friends' birthdays. We surprised them with cookies and pizza. Like I said meeting with my friends that are Black we meet every week and we try and get into meeting rooms and

just chill and do homework or listen to music. We laugh and cry and all that stuff. We try to meet weekly because it was tough getting everyone together in the first semester.

We help each other with our classes and give each other advice. Every time a song comes, we take a break from our work, so it will be a mini-break and when the song is over, we go back to doing our work. So, it was really fun. We still hang out to this day after classes we will go to the campus center and we will see each other and say hi and sit down talk to each other and go out. So yeah that definitely helped me.

*Jamal went on to describe how he felt there was racist behavior in how one of his friends did not get hired as an admissions ambassador when another student who was White and new one of the ambassadors did get hired.*

One my friends she applied and one of one of the ambassador's friends applied and the other girls wasn't really interested as much as my friend was. So, the other girl got it. My friend didn't. So, my friend had a full meeting with them based on what happened and they did not take it serious because she's Black. So that upset her and upset me because my friend was a way better contender than the other person. Stuff like that does happen at Forman. There are still issues that needs to be fixed at Forman but working through it is going to be a process because not everybody wants to actually talk about it or take the steps to change it.

*Jamal's initial experiences are mixture of dealing with isolation, while also finding joy with other students, and staff mentors. Jamal's positive attitude is a large part of his current success navigating the PWI culture. Jamal also began to describe the changing relationship with his mother and the different types of conversations they are now having as adults together.*

*Current college experiences.* My mom and I have a lot more mature conversations about life and future goals which is a change. The questions are a lot deeper than when I was in high school. Like it's actually more about life than the little stuff. So, then we have real conversations and I will talk to her about my classes, and other people I meet or have issues with. She will tell me you're 18 now you're growing up you're going to have to deal with it. You definitely have to toughen up and take things at face value. My aunt likes to give me advice on dating advice. I have a lot more mature conversation with my family members now after going to Forman.

I also have a lot more freedom, like now I go out with my friends and my mom doesn't say anything. And in the back of my mind I am like she is not going to say anything? She still gives me curfews when I at home because if not she will worry. So there has been a lot more freedom. I am still doing my chores at home at home including cleaning clothes, helping my sisters with like homework like usual. Everything else is pretty much the same, but I definitely have a lot more freedom.

*As Jamal described the changing relationship with his mother, he was also able to explain the changes he has seen in himself while attending Forman University. Jamal expresses new found responsibilities and aspects of his learning style that have changed.*

Responsibility wise I've been more responsible for myself. I'm responsible for going to work and class now. I am also responsible for turning in stuff on time and not making excuses. I will ask my mom for money sometimes if I run out, but that is about it. I definitely see more responsibilities with class, work and then budgeting my money.

I have also learned a lot about patience, I was so impatient in high school. If I couldn't get it, I didn't care. Being impatient is not good because I wouldn't focus, and I

realize you can get everything by being patient. So, I'm being patient and willing to learn. I have also learned there are alternate ways to do something and that has helped me a lot. That's another thing with math I learned how to study. Math is like muscle memory, where you had to memorize the steps the formulas and the signs so that helped me coming to Forman because of going to the tutoring center. That's a weekly thing for me. Because of my math and my oceanography class, and the math that is in those classes I found a tutor to help me. I use the tutoring center as a resource or backup you. I'd get it but I just need some somebody to help me remember the steps. So, I know how to do the math and that has helped me a lot.

*Jamal was asked about giving advice to his past self, and he emphasized a great need to focus on grades, and also being less isolated in high school would have been better for him also.*

I would tell myself to work on those grades. Because I didn't I really my senior year I really didn't care. I was like I will go to college, but it really didn't matter to me then. But you know coming in I did get accepted but I didn't get any scholarships, so I was mad at myself. I should have worked harder on my grades. Also, studying more, I didn't like studying in high school I just winged most tests. Also, not being afraid to meet new people because I stayed to myself a lot. That's the only advice I would give myself and trust myself because you know I was a doubter. That's the biggest advice I would give myself is you never know unless you try it. So that's what I think.

*Jamal at this point in his experiences began to think about his future goals and aspirations, and how Forman can help to get him there. Meeting with EOF staff*

*provided him the opportunity to think about traveling and pursuing other life goals he had been thinking about.*

I definitely need to network more, I met with the EOF staff for my quarterly meeting and they were talking about internships and that caught my eye because I always wanted to travel either out of state or out of the country. I would also like to study abroad, I definitely want to do that. Ever since I was little, I used to always watch animal documentaries about the ocean and I would just stare in the ocean and I am going to do that someday, I want to learn to dive. So right now, it sounds crazy, but I want to get my certificate in diving. I'm hoping to do that at Forman. I love scuba diving and I want to travel to the tropics and do photography underwater. I was in a photography class my senior year in high school and that was one of my goals on a project about myself. I want to have a career like animal plant doing underwater videography. When you see those documentaries, I want to be one of the people, I am going to do things with the ocean. My goal is to have more experience with those animals in the ocean. That's why I came here because they had a good program in marine sciences and a lot of opportunity. So hopefully I can use that to get around to doing that one day.

**Howard.** Howard is a 21-year-old Black male from Camden, New Jersey. Howard has a 3.31-grade point average and is majoring in business. Howard lives on campus as a resident assistant and a housing office worker, and just finished his term as president of the unified Black student society. He also attended the summer EOF program as a first-time freshman when he first came to Forman.

*Howard reflected a great deal on how he has grown from his freshmen year to the student leader he is now. Howard was able to express negative experiences that he had*



*not thought about or shared until this discussion. Howard also recognized the significant growth he has had in standing up for what he believes in and being able to confidently voice his opinion.*

*In this section, Howard described how in high school he was misguided and during an incident with a teacher he was sent to another classroom. However, after that experience, he became a better student and a leader in that classroom. Howard describes this experience as a turning point in his education, as he began to excel and work with the teachers more.*

***Pre-college experiences.*** Before college, I was a troublesome student, not, but was misguided. In ninth grade of my freshman year of high school I childishly made a threat towards a teacher and I was suspended for four days and placed on probation in the school. Ever since then I changed my act. I was always on honor role as a student. Due to being misguided, I was placed in a student improvement group. I quickly became a leader in that group and became one of the top students due to my grade point average I had a 3.2. It wasn't a great grade point average, but it was better than everyone else's. I quickly became a favorite of all the teachers and the faculty at the school. It showed with the right guidance, that I can change my way of living.

*Howard then started to talk about his home, Camden, New Jersey, and how he has experienced negative things, but has a lot of hope for his hometown. Howard then also spoke about his family.*

I come from Camden, New Jersey. I believe in family values, loving yourself, loving your community, and loving those who are always around you. I wasn't outside as a child, so I wasn't always exposed to the things that were in Camden but in high school

being in Camden hit a bunch of my friends and I got a late grasp of reality. Just by playing basketball with my friends I saw something that was new to me at the age of 14., I'd never seen before. Camden is a very beautiful city no matter what the media try to say about it, and it is filled with talented young people. I feel like Camden can progress in many different ways in the future.

I don't see my extended family as much anymore, but my mother and I have the same relationship. She sees that I'm an adult and she's seen the growth that I've been through and how I've grown into a different person, then I was when I left home, my senior year of high school. My sister is in Texas now so I can't really connect with her as much as I want to anymore.

*Howard did seem saddened by the fact he does not get to see his family as much, but then transitioned to speaking about his initial experiences at Forman in EOF.*

**Initial college experiences.** At Forman I experienced like a super culture shock. EOF is primarily people of color. That wasn't two different., but just something as simple as like being in the woods, was very different. With EOF there was still limit your freedom because we had to wake up at 6a.m. every morning. We had to do schoolwork all day with a bunch of restrictions and we didn't get the full freedom like the first few weeks at Forman where I was exposed to the rest of Forman. I thought it was still going to be a bunch of people of color until my first few weeks. I was shocked because of how the school markets the school website where it's very diverse. I felt mislead but can't really blame them for wanting to improve their numbers. I quickly adapted to the lack of diversity and gained friends of each and every race and ethnicity. I went to White student parties and went to Black student parties. I'm a very social person on campus and a lot of

people know me and within those first few weeks I went from being uncomfortable to just put myself out there again and I got to know a lot of people with in my first month at Forman.

*Howard then went on to explain about a traumatic event that occurred during his freshmen year in the residence halls that he had not spoken about or remembered until our conversation.*

I never told anybody about this because I didn't look at it as important back then, but now I look at it now was like very traumatic. So, I heard my neighbors where I lived freshmen year. It was a bunch of White residents of my floor shouting in the next room. I heard them say you're acting like an N-word, your acting like an N-word, your acting like an N-word. I heard this and though this can't be real and ignored it. But thinking back on it, I wish I wouldn't have ignored it. I wish I would have at least talked with them, or talk to my roommate who was very close with the RA. I could have also talked to complex director, but I chose not to talk to anybody because I just felt like it wasn't important at the time. It's weird because the place I'm at right now I would think it would be important to my younger self. But I just ignored it as much as I could.

*At this point Howard began to reflect on his first experiences with a club and organization on campus.*

Another part of my freshman year was the Unified Black Student Society. There was a rally outside and it was a Black Lives Matter protest and for some reason I was very excited even though I was never part of anything like that socially. Others looked at me as like some type of leader because I kind of led a rally. I was shouting many of the

chants aggressively and I was very excited. And then after that people started talking to me and that is where I feel like I found my footing on campus.

I will also give all credit to working in residential life. I've had three positions within residential life since my freshman year. I started here in September of my freshman year and ever since then I learned everything I could here. I've learned about certain spots on campus and what's good about campus, what to stay away from, who to stay away from, what to do in a certain emergency, and how to interact with people. I learned from the faculty and staff and that benefited me knowing more about Forman University.

*Howard then moved way from social experiences and began to explain some of his feelings regarding isolation in his classes because he is very often one of the few Black students. Additionally, being from Camden, New Jersey, Howard has taken offense to comments made by faculty about his hometown.*

During my freshmen year I always noticed that there were only ever one or two Black students in class and anytime there was a Black related question, all eyes were turned on me. There was a conversation in one of my classes related to Trump and a foolish statement was made. The professor said something about Camden, New Jersey and I was really offended by it because he said something about the parents of Camden and looked at all of the negatives instead of looking at the positives and I was infuriated. I could not move my mouth to say anything because I kept thinking what if he looks at your grade and changed it just based on the fact that you said something instead of standing up to him. But honestly, there are so many examples. I learned later that professors aren't allowed to

do that, and you can easily go to the dean and talk about that. I wish it would have said some about him making those statements about my hometown.

*After describing a negative experience with one of Howard's professors he then began to describe how he realized during his first semesters he had to change his behavior based on poor grades.*

Managerial accounting that was the worst class I've ever taken, and I barely made it out of that class, but at the same time I was still doing my freshman year shenanigans. I was always hanging out friends instead of studying and going into a library and making sure that my grades were right. At the end of the day I felt like I deserved at least a B, but I didn't. Also, at the end of the day I was doing the same stuff I was my freshman year that was detrimental to my academic success plus microeconomics was a hard class. I ended up taking a W in the class, but it affected everything. Probably one semester later then I should but it showed me that I need to cut the slack and actually take my life seriously because as much as I didn't want to believe college will affect my life, I realized late if my GPA decreases it will definitely affect me.

*Howard then transitioned to his current college experiences and how he has grown and matured into a student who takes his academics seriously.*

**Current college experiences.** I think I've grown tremendously. I've gained more confidence and fixed my act since I used to be a little immature, in fact, I used to be very immature. My freshman year I didn't have the leadership skills I have now. I was always anxious and cautious and afraid to live a little on campus. But if I could go back and talk to myself. I would tell younger Howard not to be stuck in his bedroom instead go to all the parties and try to help people. Work on yourself and go back to go into the library. I

would also tell younger Howard to do your work and have a better GPA. Also, make those connections quicker and don't wait to be a Junior to make connections with internships. I would also say look at jobs more for that post graduate life. Also, take your community seriously. There's a lot but I would also say, stand up for people and step up to people that really are disrespectful on campus. That's for sure and don't be afraid to speak up. Check the people that are in your classes that have really foolish mindsets full of bigotry because it's okay to check people in their behavior because at the end of the day it's better knowing that you said something. If you didn't say something you will regret it because you will live with it and think about it forever.

I'm like more likely to confront someone who has the ignorant perception of societal issues because I was the president of the Unified Black Student Society so I'm more likely to check someone one who says all lives matter. In actuality that that language is just a counter attack for Black lives matter. I'm more aware of societal issues and more likely to talk about those. I care about Forman university students too. I care a lot more than I did my freshman year because I want to go into higher education administration for graduate school so I feel as though with me caring about the students here that will translate to me caring about all students wherever I want to go in the future.

*Howard then began to speak about advice he would give to other Black men attending Forman University.*

I would say don't be afraid to talk to faculty and staff and also go to those meetings that will help you to become the person that you to see yourself become. Don't be afraid to do the things that you need to do to become that person. I will also say listen to the things that people try to tell you. You don't have to accept it but don't just push it

away. Listening won't hurt you. Also, get involved because it looks great on your resumé, and the University develops you into a leader. Go for a high ranking within the clubs but you should try to go for student senate and be on the executive board. Do something to make yourself productive so you won't fall in to being bored and then dropping out of school. I know a lot people who had dropped out of college because of the fact that school was boring, and they didn't end up doing anything at home. So, it's making them even less productive so make yourself productive.

*Howard started to express the role of Residential Life at Forman University and how it has helped other Black students on campus.*

I think the office of residential life has been doing a great job by propelling the development of Black men on campus because you guys can just hire like a lot more. I've seen in my three years as a resident assistant and I've been able to see the success of many Black men and men of color that have been hired. The hiring of Black men as resident assistants has been important to the Forman culture thus far because there are so many different groups and clubs and organizations. They are on so many different organizations with executive boards you can be a part of. It's not just good enough to be a member of a club but Black men are actually on the executive boards and student senate. So, the fact that residential life has been picking them up and having them influence other students and residents who will look at them as a blueprint for how to make their impact on campus. I applaud you guys on that. That's one thing I'd love to say.

I'm also happy they have Sankofa, plus, half of the executive board right now is resident assistants. I feel like they have the ability to give different perspectives to their residential areas. Students who may not be aware of certain things and they may learn

something new might learn something new and they'll be able to teach other people something new and give them different perspectives that they may not be familiar with. It is just a way of educating people and giving them more knowledge and being to make the world a better place and a safer place as well. This the effect of diversity I see on campus.

*After Howard described how he saw the resident assistant role impacting the diversity on campus and in the residence halls, Howard expressed his thoughts about where he sees himself after he graduates.*

How do I see myself after I graduate? Well hopefully I still have a sense of humor. I see myself as still being very social but holding myself more accountable for my actions. I'll be more responsible, but I will still be the same person who I am today, as well as the person I was five years ago. I don't want to change in that way, but I can tweak it a little bit, but I feel like I shouldn't change my entire personality for anything, that is just not part of my plan. Being authentic is so impact important and I would not change that for anything in the world. Honestly, I just feel like, you should never do that to yourself.

**Kenny.** Kenny is a 21-year-old Black male from Atlantic City, New Jersey which is a community very close to Forman University. Kenny is living on campus and is involved in several high-level student leadership positions at the University. Kenny is pursuing a degree in communication studies and has a grade point average of 2.88. He also attended the EOF summer program, as a first-time freshman.

*Kenny is in a high-level student leadership role and serves as a representative to many of his peers on campus, but also must navigate his identity of*



*those administrators he sees at the institution regularly. Kenny feels a strong need to use his experiences and connections to help other students of color. Kenny often feels that he does not understand the Black agenda of other students but relies on his friends to help him understand why other issues are so important.*

*Kenny spoke a great deal about an experience before college called champions youth which offered students experiences to learn about educational opportunities. Kenny also spoke very fondly about how the mentors in this program taught him about being a better student and the experiences that he could take advantage of at college and in the community.*

***Pre-college experiences.*** I think a lot about what I was taught when I was in my mentoring program I brought to Forman, it was called Champions Youth, it was a part of Forman at some point in time and we used to have these like mini-versity things that we did. The point of the program was to expose young people from Atlantic City to the college atmosphere and what people do at college. For example, we would go to the Fannie Lou Hamer symposium and we would go to different plays they were having on campus. Other activities were writing seminars with Peter Murphy. All of these programs were a bunch of different things and they all added up to getting mini-versity certificates at the end of the year. I think I got two of those one year.

*The champions youth program provided him an important foundation for Kenny in terms of preparing him for college before attending college. Kenny went on to speak about a mentor he had in high school and how that also prepared him to go to college.*

I feel like I made my adjustment before I got to Forman because of my mentor. I would bring it up, but I feel like my mentor in the program really set me up for success.

He taught me like the things that I needed for college before I even got here. When I was a senior in high school, he showed me you can't slack off and you can't do this you can't do that. From my sophomore year to my senior year and even now he continues to push me and tell me, “Yo you need to stay on top of things. Are you getting this done? Are you getting that done?”

*Kenny went on to explain how another mentor who later became a fraternity brother, was a mentor for him and taught him about life.*

I also got introduced to Mr. Kearney, who started our Greek chapter at Forman and later became one of my fraternity brothers when I got in. Mr. Kearney really reinforced why people don't care if you like have different struggles, for instance, I'm dyslexic. People don't care about that. They only care about the end result and getting things done. Once I realize those excuses don't matter it's like ok, people don't really care. For instance, I can't say “aww man like I need some extra time, you didn't tell me in advance, and I don't really care like that.” I learned it doesn't matter what you struggle with, you can always do better. So, coming in with that mindset it changed my idea of my work ethic and I realized how hard I had work at something because he showed me people don't care what you are going through, they only care about the end result. So, knowing that, I put that kind of work into what I was doing.

*After Kenny described what his mentor Mr. Kearney had taught him about work ethic, Kenny then began to discuss the impact his family has had on his life.*

For the last few years I have felt like I needed to stay away and just stay here which is like why I am here all the time. I understand that my family is struggling. My mom has been unemployed since my senior year of high school and she's been bouncing

around from person to person just to stay on her feet. She lived with my sister for a period of time which is why I want to stay on campus during the summer. She lives in Bridgeton which is in the middle of nowhere and I didn't want to be in the middle of nowhere and I don't have a car. It would have been hard to travel back and forth and to take advantage of different opportunities. It's easier to just stay in this area because this is my central hub. I don't have as much my family, and my home is different from a lot of other Black families who are close and like they have their own little traditions, but I don't really have that. I don't really have a big family like most Black families do.

I feel that my family fell apart, that structure fell apart when my grandmother passed away, because she was the glue that held everything together. And then once that once she passed away my uncle started acting crazy, acting differently and he didn't want anything to do with our family, it's just a bunch of nonsense.

But overall, I can depend on my family. I can go talk to them about whatever and talk to my mom. My dad is my rock because he has always been there for me. He's never missed one of my football games, or if I'm ever being honored somewhere. He'll always find a way to make it there. He's amazing. I guess that's something that I have that some of my friends don't have which is my dad being my best friend. My friend's father is in and out of prison. So, he doesn't have that father figure to have around. I don't have that problem because my dad has always been there for me. He has never missed a football game. He's always been there.

*Kenny's mentors and strong family presence provided a solid foundation for him to feel comfortable attending Forman University. Kenny then went on to explain his initial college experiences which included the five-week summer EOF program.*

*Initial college experiences.* Well my first few weeks were different than everybody else's because I was in the EOF program. So, my first two weeks were a little more structured. During EOF, I was taught how to study properly and how to use my time effectively instead of just sitting around and lollygagging. We woke up at 6:00 in the morning and we didn't go to bed until like 11:00 at night. We were always doing something so if we weren't at hall modules and we weren't in modules and if we weren't in class, then we were at lunch. If we weren't at lunch, we were all we were always doing something. So they bestowed that idea that you always need to be doing something, for example, if you're eating, eat, but after you eat you need to go to module, and if you're not at a module you need to go to class, and if you're not in class you always have to be doing something. Then you destress at the end of the night and then you start the process all over the next day and you do what you have to do and get it done.

As the semester went on, I definitely didn't wake up at 6:00 am after that but that experience showed me the different resources I have at my disposal. I need to circle back a little bit more but as soon as I got done with the EOF program I was going to the tutoring center all the time to get my papers checked over because I knew that I needed my grammar stuff in order. I had to think about everything I wanted to say and say it correctly and make sure I'm communicating effectively.

Also, once I get to know somebody I like, and I realized I have different resources. For instance, I got a job at the university in the summertime before I got here. I met Walt and I liked working in that office I was the first guy we have ever had to work at the front desk. That experience was different just because I got introduced to people that I should know, and I learned that I could like count on these people.

*Kenny described how being outgoing and being a part of the EOF program led him to meet people and make connections in order to feel comfortable on campus. Kenny later goes on to explain how making connections is something he excels at and how this skill provides him with the opportunities to make change at the University while also helping others. In the next section, Kenny describes advice from his grandmother as he explains his experience about code-switching and being able to navigate the PWI environment and culture.*

I also live by like one of the principles that my grandma taught me which was there is a time and place for everything. I was brought up on the idea of code switching and I do that very seamlessly and my friends mess with me about it because I'll be regular for my friends. As soon as I get an environment where I have to speak a little more proper, and I have to do things a little different it's very seamless for me like. As I'm getting higher in student leadership and as I am getting higher in the University and once, I get to know someone I try to weave a little bit of my personality. I know I have that foundational principle that my grandma taught which is there's a time and a place for everything. I am not going to be regular if I'm just meeting someone or if I'm doing something. I know that I have to put on my best face. If I do, I know that I will be introduced as "oh this is a good guy okay". After that I get to know the person, and we start to get to know each other and I can start to show off a few of my little quirks. I really like weaving in who I am, but that transition isn't as seamless for a lot of my friends.

*Kenny expressed very matter-of-factly that he switched between persona's depending on the time and place and did not express any frustration in not being able to*

*be himself when meeting administrators at the institution. Kenny then began to show some frustration at the current structure of the institution and the way he feels that the institution values Black history and culture.*

***Current college experiences.*** I've never had personal experiences where I felt uncomfortable, but I feel uncomfortable for other people who have experiences that are wrong. Well not kind of wrong they are wrong. Recently I had a young lady come up to me and tell me that the dance team we have here is prejudice. They were 12 young ladies of color that tried out for the team and none of them made it which was weird to me because the dance team was a hip-hop dance team. So, I went back to what I do, and I used my resources and I talked to the Associate Provost about not even the dance team, but how there is no relevant education for dancers of color here. Where are the classes for that? We understand it's not a structured dance form but where's the African dance classes where are the African-American dance classes and why is that African-American dance classes that we have are not counted as a dance class like that?

*After Kenny spoke about dance, he then began to describe being at a PWI and the isolation he feels in the form of not seeing classes and other activities for Black students as a natural part of the curriculum.*

That feeling of making us feel like outliers, “like oh yeah that Black thing, I took the Black class.” You took a class that happened to represent Black people customs and cultures. We don't say, “oh yeah we took that European class dance class and I played with those European instruments.” No, I played my instruments and I did my thing and it took me a while to really feel this way and to really understand where my friends are

coming from. For a long time, I just put my head down and got through this stuff. I didn't understand why they were upset and mad. I did not understand why was bothering them.

As I get farther into the Africana studies program, I'm seeing that this isn't anything new for instance, Black women have always had the best interests of everyone, and Black women really take care of everyone. But who's taking care of Black women. The institution says, "Oh we're diverse we want this we want that," but where are the diverse class selections and don't just put it in Africana studies, because that's our new program. It makes sense to put it there but where are the classes that represent the diversity at the institution and within the institution.

*Kenny expressed frustration that from his point of view the University has not delivered on the promises of making the campus more diverse.*

Where are the Native American dance classes, where are the Latin dance classes, and I understand the University brings master classes here they can take those for a week, but you can only do the Black thing for a week. "We did that Black thing for a week and it was the class was and it was amazing mom," if the University is going to be all about it, they need to really invest in those classes and those are the things that make me uncomfortable.

I have never had my own experience where I've felt uncomfortable and it's because I'm so good at code switching. I know who I can talk to and how I need to talk to them. And I think that's right. Really that's just me wanting to get to know people. I don't want people to see me as that Black kid. I want them to see me as Kenny. Another thing that kind of makes me uncomfortable is me advocating for the Black agenda. In my Africana Studies classes and talking about President Obama people talk about how he

didn't have a Black agenda for the nation and how he made himself racially ambiguous. I think that's the correct phrase. His race wasn't attached, and he was just Barack Obama. I feel like that's kind of how I am, I don't think people say oh yes that's Black Kenny, I am just literally Kenny. That's what I intentionally wanted to happen. I clearly know that I'm Black. But I guess the struggle of not being Black enough or having to be Blacker, I just want to exist.

*Kenny shared specific examples of when he feels uncomfortable trying to negotiate how others see him. He also spoke about how other students must navigate the PWI community in order to fit into other narratives.*

And I feel that's another thing that students of color have to struggle with here is having to either be Blacker or attempt to be Black for the people they like. Or you are not Black enough and people don't even consider people's experiences like that. Our experience has to be one experience and I just I just read between the World and Me. For example, he was talking about how he met like this girl. And she went to India and she was taking pictures with her cousin and she had her hijab on and how he was like you just you just look like you just another N-word like just another nigger like. I mean you're still a nigger. He said who are you trying to be? Are you trying to be Miss Whitey McWhite?

I think that's one thing that I've really struggled with. It's not understanding the Black agenda, and how people get frustrated if you don't understand. I feel that that's a part of the Black experience as well. People who don't understand where you're coming from and you can't get super upset and I try to say that there is another way to see things. Howard who was my roommate my freshman year who has been my best friends, has really helped me grow a lot grow by showing me why people are upset. Like this is why



people feel this way. Recently he taught me about a song I didn't know anything about that my friends thought I would know about right away.

*Kenny was recalling how his friends have helped him navigate aspects of the Black community culture on campus, as he does not always understand certain aspects that others may seem as fundamental to the Black community.*

Just having people to explain and break things down to me and explain things to me, people don't have to get flustered because I do not understand what they are talking, if they were like, I'm going to explain that to you, that would be more helpful. Sometimes Howard sees where I'm coming from that is really helpful. I mean I am not President Obama, and I may not have a Black agenda but like I still care. I understand that there's like serious problems with life in the Black community and how there needs to be reform and different like opportunities that are provided to us which is why I go out of my way to make sure that people have opportunities to climb the ladder. I always make sure that people are introduced to different people like the president of the University, and the people that are in position to change your life.

That stuff is important to me that because you have to have a relationship with these people and the people need to know who you are and what you are like. I think that's my Black agenda to make sure that others have an opportunity to get into the room and that people see others for who they are because that's what I really want. It's innately very obvious that I'm Black. Okay let's get over that. I want to get to the meat and bones of who I am and what I can offer you. I have skills other than being Black and that's another thing that I really don't like about the institution.

They have professors who teach in the Africana studies program that they only selected them because they were Black. Why aren't they hiring people who actually have a passion to teach about Africana Studies. Are they going to hire anybody for the program or are they going to spread the people here even thinner? I feel like that's also been my experience that I've been spread too thin because they asked me to be in this photo shoot because they are trying to show our diversity at the institution. I'm all for it and I see what they are doing. But what else are they doing, other than taking pictures of me.

**Oliver.** Oliver is a 19-year-old Black male from Atlantic City, New Jersey who is attending Forman University and lives on campus. He is pursuing a business studies degree and has a grade point average of 3.03 and serves on the student government. Oliver is also a part of Greek life on campus and also participated in the EOF summer program as a first-time freshman.

*Being involved in student government and his fraternity has given Oliver a solid foundation, and his realizations about academics have provided him with the confidence he needs to be successful, academically, and socially in a PWI culture. Oliver prescribes to the idea of cultural taxation which means that he understands he must work harder than his White counterparts, and when choosing potential fraternity members, he expects that from them. In this first section, Oliver began speaking about his family and how diverse it was growing up in Atlantic City. Oliver described his education before attending Forman as being very diverse which he enjoyed.*

**Pre-college-experiences.** Well I'll say one thing, I'm Jamaican and my whole family's Jamaican and they came from Jamaica. So being around that culture my whole

life and growing up and going to high school in A.C. high school was a very diverse experience. I was born in New York, but you get a taste of what it's like to be from the Caribbean and the American side. I was born in Brooklyn, but I had to be Caribbean and American and then I went to a school that is diverse that has a lot of White kid's, Black kids, Pakistani kids, and Spanish kids. It really made me see a lot of different things when I came to Forman. I see its different now because it's not as diverse as before. I still see different cultures at Forman I see like a Jamaican kid here and a Spanish kid here, but I can tell Forman is actually trying to make it more diverse. And I can tell from the time I graduate it'll be way more diverse from the first time I came in.

*Oliver began to share the personal things people may not know about him that he enjoys in his spare time, that was important to him growing up.*

Before high school I really like watching Yukio, and sometimes Pokémon I was a big wrestling fan of the WWE. I was a big wrestling fan back in the day. There are just little things that people wouldn't expect me to be interested. I'm still in a big game head and I love playing video games. That's definitely my life. I love playing Call of Duty. You know all those other games like NBA 2K is the stuff that sticks with me.

*Oliver explained this his passions because he described how sometimes people may seem him as a Black male that likes to do things that are often stereotyped with being a Black male. However, in this case, he described his passion for cartoons, wrestling, and video games, which he believes would surprise some people. Oliver described his experiences attending Atlantic City high school and some of the stereotypes he has experienced.*

I went to school in Atlantic City it's not the best it does not have the best reputation, and you know there is always that that interpretation that just because you went to a certain school that there is a perception of a certain lifestyle going to public school. People just view it as oh you're not worthy enough to make it out to Forman or even college in general, but I never let that faze me. My mother always told me say what you want but it is all about how you feel about how you feel about yourself. That's the main reason I didn't let the negativity bother me because I know I was going to be great and I knew I was be dedicated and I just I wanted to do. I knew that I wanted to go to college that's how it started.

Before Forman they would always preach to me about school school, school, school but they always let me know at the end of the day you are your own man. You are going to do what you want to do at the end of the day. That advice really stuck with me. My mom, my family and friends are always loving and outgoing and always looking out for me. They are always making sure I am doing well. They always tell we'll always be here to help you if you need any help with things like that.

*Even though Oliver had heard negative perceptions about where he lived and went to school his mother provided him guidance to overcome those perceptions and ultimately want to attend Forman University. Oliver recalled memories where he realized he had to work harder than others because he was a minority.*

There were some White people around me growing up. You know there were minorities and White kids. But the White kids were doing great and things like that. Then when I went to college tours and I got to see what is was like and got to meet Black administrators. One of the administrators always told me you know just because you

didn't do good on your SAT's don't let that stop you from the fact that you are great, and you could be great whatever you put your mind to. I actually realized that if you tried to stand out above everybody else that, that's when that's when you're really going get the calls. That's when I said to myself, I am really going to go hard, and I literally applied to like 20 different colleges. I was going hard no matter what my SAT score was. I kept on working hard and thankfully I got to college that knew that I could.

*While Oliver faced a lot of adversity, in the form of discouragement based on where he lived and went to school prior to attending college, he was able to persevere and attend Forman University. Oliver began his initial college experiences encountering the PWI culture at Forman University and describing those experiences.*

**Initial college experiences.** That was one of the first things I understood, I know I was going to be putting more work in than everybody else. Especially being a minority and getting into college and then when I got to Forman and realizing that it is not as diverse as my high school. So, I really took it as more of a challenge than a hindrance because there's nothing wrong with Forman not being that diverse. I look at it as they are not the same color as me, but I know they're doing their class work. I'm going to be right up there with them I don't care what people might think because when you look at my GPA or know look at the work, I put on campus they can never say he didn't put enough effort in. I look at myself in mirror every day and know I have to work hard.

*Early on Oliver realized that he would need to work harder than everyone else because he is Black, and he carries that mentality with him to be successful in college. Oliver spoke about EOF and trying to navigate the physical aspects of the institution in just getting around to find his classes.*

At the end of the day EOF made sure we did our work even though we're in college they made sure we did our work regardless of who you are, and they also made us stay focused on why you're at college in the first place. That's what made me understand like wow I'm on my own now because at first there was a curfew. I could do I want to do but I knew I had to get my school work done. I would say to myself let me go back inside because I would be lollygagging playing basketball all day and I know I couldn't do that. So that's what really made me understand.

Trying to navigate around Forman was interesting because even though we did EOF we didn't know exactly where we didn't know the whole campus. So, I would see somebody walking around and ask them where to go and it helped me understand that Forman is a cool place people would really help me out. This made me understand that you know even though we're students here we are still looking out for each other.

At first, had to adjust to the college atmosphere in general because I took the school bus. When you live on campus you literally are on your own and if you miss class it's on you, and if you don't eat don't eat no one is going to cook for you. Unless you live in on campus housing with a kitchen like housing one. That really made me understand about becoming a man now. I am going to do my own things and actually take initiative with certain things and I realized that I had to be more responsible I definitely needed to learn more about that.

*Not only did Oliver appreciate he was growing up be he also shared the importance of faculty and staff in his life and how that has made him more comfortable at Forman.*

I came here and I met Mr. King and he just that vibe. I also met Anthony who worked with EOF. Anthony is my preceptor he's a great guy. I met with those two gentlemen first at Forman and they just let me know that this college is a PWI. But at the same time, you know we're about our business. We are here to help you. We want to be here. I felt comfortable right away and they made me understand if you don't go to Random University, and if I don't go to NYU, or Rowan that I could still go to Forman and be comfortable.

Frank was one of my first professors my first semester at Forman. He always let me know that he was there for me and there have been other professors for me at Forman. I go and see Frank and say hi just to show him I am interested in Forman. Absolutely. Having this relationship definitely helped me with a lot of things. Frank is one of the professors that stands out to me at the moment.

*After reflecting on staff and faculty mentors, Oliver began to think and reflect about who he thought he was when he first came to Forman.*

When I first came to Forman, I was a little bit different only because I didn't know what college would be about. I just came in with an open mind and then I realized it's about managing your time. It's all about time management and I understand that everything is not always going to go your way. This is college and not everything is going to be perfect, but you know as long as you can just stay with it and stay confident.

*Oliver early on had very positive experiences making connections with faculty and staff which gave him the confidence and support to succeed socially and academically at Forman. Oliver also spoke very highly of the EOF program and*

*recognizing that he would need to change and prioritize in order to be successful. Oliver goes on to speak about his experience in student senate and what that has meant to him.*

***Current college experiences.*** Before student senate I felt I could make an impact on campus, but I didn't know how to. I didn't know what I could do to be involved and exactly how I could make an impact and actually have my voice be heard. Student senate is the voice of the students and actually made me feel like I have power at the end of the day. I understand this power is my responsibility as a student senator. I learned I need to talk this seriously and understand that students and not everyone has had a chance to reach out and explain their problems so that's why they come to the senate and I would definitely say has helped out a lot.

My confidence has definitely grown because I'm even more involved in campus being on student senate now and being able to see the problems at Forman. People actually come to me about the problems and I understood like wow I'm pretty much an administrator on the campus. People actually look up to me to help to make sure things are different or can be seen. Once you have that responsibility it makes you feel a certain way, it makes you feel important like.

*He also shared how joining other student groups like the unified Black student society and his fraternity have helped to ground him as well.*

I am a brother of the Iota Phi Theta Fraternity Incorporated. We meet up here and there a couple times during the semester and we talk about certain things like diversity on campus. We have events and things like that and there is also this new organizational on campus called los latinos unidos (LLU), it is a Spanish organization. That's actually the



reason I help out them because they actually try to help be more diverse. There is definitely another way to help start to be more diverse at the University.

I've been able to network with certain people because of my fraternity brother Ike. But I was able to reach out to the head of marketing at Forman to do an internship next semester. So, things like that have helped my career and has definitely helped me be able to open up more to people. When you're in a fraternity you do a lot of community service. Being able to open up and actually be more involved helped me to confirm the potential you knew you had. That's definitely something my fraternity has brought out of me. Being in the fraternity will continue to bring it out of me and I just hope I'll be able to bring more people into my fraternity.

The thing I really look for in new brothers is their drive. I like to figure out if they really are who they said they are or if they work hard. There's a lot of people who say they want to do it but then when the word comes, they get overwhelmed by all our knowledge classes and things like that and they just fold under pressure right. I want to know if they will be really dedicated? In college you know you always have to put in extra effort especially being a minority I always had to put the extra effort in the first place so that's what I really look for. Who's really going to move the needle when asking who's going to work hard who's going to be dedicated and things like that.

*Oliver's explanation of cultural taxation not only drives him but drives his evaluation of others in his fraternity. In this next section, Oliver shared advice he would give to others entering Forman and his younger self about attending Forman University.*

I would definitely tell to not worry about the females because a 16-year-old Oliver he was still focused on school, but he was a pretty boy trying to talk to all the

girls. First don't worry about the females at the end of the day you come to college for your education. You don't want to get yourself caught up in some nonsense and you should always remember that you came to college for a reason you did not come to college to be a lollygagger, its ok, to socialize but be mindful of how you do it and always be involved. Please, please get involved because there is nothing worse than a residential student that is not involved. I hate, I hate when kids go back to my dorm because Forman has a lot to offer. I would definitely say get involved because it doesn't hurt to reach out to people.

Don't be afraid to talk to people just because even though there isn't a lot of diversity and a lot of White people that doesn't mean that they are not as cool as Black people. I don't like how people stereotype. We are all people, were all human, and we all came to college as college students, they should at least open up and talk to people. That would be the first step on getting involved because you never know a person that you might be on student senate and, then boom, you go to the student senate meeting, you see you see what it's about, and you might like it.

**Phillip.** Phillip is a 26-year-old, Black male who transferred to Forman and is pursuing a communications degree with a 3.25-grade point average. He transferred from a local community college where he was heavily involved. He continues to be involved at Forman in various positions on campus. Phillip grew up locally in Pleasantville, New Jersey, and commutes to Forman. Phillip does not have a vehicle so he must find alternative ways to commute back and forth to campus.

*Phillip's experiences are truly unique because he first attended community college where he was heavily involved socially and academically which let him to*

*transfer to Forman. However, once he attended Forman, he still has trouble meeting as many people as he would like. Phillip has also had some significant losses in his family which has required him to be at home more to take care of his sister. Phillip also must use public transportation to get to the University which limits his ability to be a part of clubs and organizations on campus. However, through all of those obstacles, he has been able to persevere by being an orientation leader and making sure he stays on top of his academics.*

*Phillip began the interview speaking about his family and being from Trinidad and how he enjoys his home country. The thing he enjoys most about going home to Trinidad is the sense of community.*

***Pre-college experiences.*** Some my friends were not bonding because in Pleasantville it's not good for people to bond with others and I am a friendly person. I am I accepted by them, but I haven't done anything with them yet. I said let them do their thing. As opposed to my country Trinidad. In Trinidad I would come over to the house we would have fun. I live up on a hill so and then we would go down to the savannah. We would play we play different sports. We would go to the river when we would want to get out of the house. The first thing you see in the morning is the mountains right there and you feel the ocean breeze. And with my friends we just go play different sports and go about.

It's like being home again but with Trinidad nowadays it's bad over there. Well it's hard to live. Not bad to live. A lot of crimes and with crimes there are bad people and there is nothing positive in the news. When I go back to my country, I feel like I'm home

because I do not need to because the village is where all my family is and there is nothing like family.

*While Phillip is very passionate about his, home, he described an experience where he was able to recreate his feeling of Trinidad at a festival in Pleasantville, New Jersey.*

A man who owned a restaurant in Philadelphia wanted to take a piece of Trinidad and bring it to America. So, we had this festival last year in January and we got a local casino to sponsor it. So, the first day we had a flag party and I got up there at noon. I got home at 10p.m. but the party was just started but I headed home because I was tired from decorating everything.

Then like two years ago I was one of the organizers I was participating in it because my family's saw a Trinidad flag and they have this big music and stuff. And they have people in costumes, people dancing, and it's like a parade. But it's not a parade. It is something that has bands and is lots of fun. Then we had a concert and I think I was there from 6p.m. to 2:00am. We bought up famous celebrities from the Caribbean, who are famous artists, I have a picture with them too.

*Phillip transitioned from speaking about his family to his high school education and how his family has impacted his outlook on education.*

My teachers taught me in high school if you go to college you will end up with a better life, and you'll be more successful. My parents would say when I was younger that if I go to college, I will be more successful, and going to colleges will teach me to be more thoughtful and professional, my parents have probably been telling me this since I was five. From my grandma's standpoint I have a taste of things that are very expensive.

I like expensive things. She was right but I also want more. I have this theory that if you go through the struggle with working hard you will become more successful. You have to go through the struggle in order to see the light which I see as being more professional and having a better life. My family's educational belief is that they want me to be the best I can be.

*Phillips family has been paramount in giving him the confidence to be successful at school, and he has been taught this value from a very young age. Phillip then went on to describe his experiences at the local community college which have had a significant impact on his life before attending Forman.*

I attended Bay Community College before Forman and I was part of student government. I remember my first time at Bay. I wasn't actually a student and I was in the recreation center. I made friends with people not knowing they were part of the student government and I went into office and saw what I figured out this was something I wanted to do. They want to make the school better, they want to make better events for the school, and I said I will do that one day. I got elected to student twice once I started going to Bay. I was also a student ambassador and part of the Black student alliance. I wanted to make a difference because I'm from the Caribbean and Trinidad Tobago. And you know things are hard over there. So, I want to make a difference. One day I want to go back and help out. It was because from all those experiences I learned who I am.

*Phillip was able to describe his involvement at community college and how that helped him grow and flourish. He then started to describe how his educational path changed.*

When I first started at Bay, I was a general studies major and then I decided I wanted to be a web designer major. Now, I'm a communications major. I brought this up in my first public speaking class in the fall of 2015. I didn't do a good job on my web graphic for animation class and then I realized that I'm a people person and I don't want to be in a cubicle all day. You deal with codes and coding in computer graphics is a different story. So actually, I wanted to do public relations where I can work with computers and people. So, I decided on public relations. So, I have to say that I wanted to go to South East University because I wanted to get that college experience and live in the dorms. But with tuition and loans and Sallie Mae that wasn't an option. So, I said I'll just go to Forman do my public relations and get my 64 credits transferred over.

*While Phillip initially wanted to go to South East University to get the college experience, he went to the local community college was actively involved socially and academically which provided a sound foundation for his education going forward. While Phillip enjoyed community college, he expressed this next section how the transition from community college to Forman was difficult.*

**Initial college experiences.** I was uncomfortable going to a new school, I remember my first time in Forman after going to Bay. I was used to a small environment and Forman is so huge. I was immediately out of my comfort zone. It took me a while to adapt. I'm still adapting. At Bay I was super involved, and I was in contact with everybody. Everybody knew me at Bay. When I got to Forman, I barely knew anybody. At Forman I want to get to know people.

Also, there are too many people and Forman has a whole different kind of different of student population. BCC's population was mixed. Forman is dominantly

White, and it makes me feel out of place sometimes. I have gotten far, and I am not really out of place a lot because I am more aware of different cultures and backgrounds. I have been taught to think about what it is like to be in the other person's shoes and how to be more aware of other people.

*While Phillip did express that Forman was not as diverse as his community college, he has been successful in using the friends he made at the community college to get advice at Forman.*

Other Bay students at Forman gave me tips because I was a new student. Everybody knew I was a new student because I would wear the lanyard with the ID, and they told me to take it off. I remember I got tips about my instructors and they told me about rate my professor. They told me they had to take to because prior when I wasn't Atlantic Cape, I have friends that graduated from Forman. One of my friends she was a criminal justice major. But she gave me like a list of courses to take. and professors to take. I still have it.

*Phillip has had a truly unique experience at Forman that not many other students may have ever had. Phillip described an extremely positive interaction with the president of the University that has made him feel more comfortable at Forman.*

My favorite story was when the president first approached me because I was wearing an Atlantic Cape sweatshirt and he said what are you wearing. He asked where my Forman gear was, and I told him that I did not have any in my shy voice. He took me to the merchandise store and told me to pick out a sweatshirt and then he the staff members working the store to put it on his tab. I saw him two weeks after that, when I went to Atlantic City to see if I catch the bus to go to Pleasantville. After he bought me

that shirt, I e-mailed him a thank you letter because it's more professional and plus it was very nice of him. I thanked him for the email and asked if he had gotten my email. He told me that my email made his day and it made him happy to be president. That experience made me feel good about myself.

I have also been able to connect with Brian through relay for life. Brian gives this welcoming vibe. I also owe a lot to being an orientation leader. I connected with Jen and she convinced me to be an orientation leader. A lot of the administrators from Atlantic Cape came to Forman a few semesters after I came to Forman. I am able to connect with them, and I am also able to connect with the president.

Even though Phillip has made positive connections with influential people like the president, he *then began to explain how sometimes he feels lonely at Forman.*

Sometimes I feel lonely at Forman I don't have many friends. So, I see people with their friends and stuff and I'm walking by myself. I always eat by myself you know unless I have some friends, to eat lunch with. But other than that, I really do not know a lot of people. People like have this sense of belonging and that's what I have when my friends are not around. However, during orientation leader training I told them like some personal. I've told them that when my mom passed away, she wasn't in my life that much but it's my mother and I want the same thing. I see everyone with their mom, and it makes me think I want a mom you know a mom figure.

*Phillip then began to reflect on what he has learned since attending Forman and shared experiences about becoming more professional.*

**Current college experiences.** Forman has taught me how to be more professional, some people say community college is 13<sup>th</sup> grade, but it's not really because



I was so involved. I was part of workshops, but Forman has taught me how to be more professional. I see Forman has the career center which has a resume workshop. ACCC has that too but Forman goes more in depth. ACCC and Forman both have their advantages and disadvantages. For instance, with ACCC we had more time to get involved and because it was smaller, I got to know more people.

I've grown a lot, because as I see it, Atlantic Cape is like the roots. But Forman is like the branches it taught me to be more of a professional. They taught me how to do different things professionally and have given me a taste of the professional life. Forman has a lot of resources with the career center being one and all the workshops they provide. So that helped me grow to be more of a professional adult.

It also helped me grow because I've learned to more network better because of my classes. I learned to connect with an actual PR professional and I had an interview with her. I interviewed her on LinkedIn, and she taught me how to dress better. Forman has given me the different tips of how to dress. They have taught me how to handshake, for instance, don't squeeze too hard. The internship fair at Forman helped me develop to be more to be professional.

*Phillip has expressed that he has learned a lot at Forman, but still finds aspects of it challenging such as not being able to stay late because he has to take care of his sister, and the different losses in his family he has experienced. He also shared how difficult it is for him to be involved in campus since he has to commute to campus without a car.*

Actually, I do not have a car. And at that time my aunt was sick. She had blood clots in her lungs, so she was in and out of the hospital and she passed away. And then last year my cousin passed away. She had she had battling cancer, so she had the

operation at Cooper Hospital, and she had a cyst in her kidney, and she died. Plus, I have to pick my sister to pick her up.

I wish I could be more involved in clubs because that is who I am, but I have to think about home because sometimes I have to take care my sister. So, I had to learn to consider the feelings of others because my aunt she used to work at Columbia University. She worked in IT. But Columbia outsourced people from India so that shut down her department and she is out of a job. She had to be home take care of my grandfather because my grandfather's not too well. I have to pick classes and work around my sister's schedule. I have to help with picking her up after school and helping her with her homework. Sometimes she is a handful.

**Sebastian.** Sebastian is a 20-year-old Black male who lives on campus who is studying communications and has a grade point average of 3.16. He is the current president of the unified Black student society and is involved in a variety of other clubs and organizations. He comes from a community about 45 minutes from Forman University.

*Sebastian expressed that he recognized how being at Forman has changed him, and how he feels better prepared for the world after attending a PWI, "So it's like the thing about Forman is it's definitely taught me about life because when you graduate from an HBCU. You'll be stuck because we're still minorities. So, whether it hits you now whether it's now or in his later you're still stuck at it just a huge PWI. Yes. So, it's definitely developed to me that I'll always be this person and I have to embrace this person because that's why learning myself was so important." Sebastian spoke about*

*how involved he was in high school and how he was able to take charge of a large project that he was proud of.*

***Pre-college experiences.*** Before Forman in high school, I was very involved with band. Mainly musical stuff like band and choirs. I was also an office worker in high school. I was a part of homecoming and practically everything. My mom was always dropping me off for an event or coming to an awards ceremony because I was being honored for participating in something. That was me before Forman. High school homecoming is an example of an experience that helped describe who I was before Forman. Homecoming is an annual thing and in my senior year I took charge of doing the dance. Every year before we did was not good, so we were going to do better. I said this year we're doing something different. And our theme was different decades. And we had 90s because we were like the last official class before 1999. We put together this dance I didn't want like Jersey club dancing, I didn't want that. I wanted to incorporate real dancing. We did moves from band, ballet and all different types. I held together with my leadership ability because I had to control and assigned these people to do certain things. We won and it was a big deal.

*While Sebastian provided great deal about his high school experience, he also wanted to spend time describing his family and how that impacted him prior to attending Forman.*

Family and religion are really important because I'm Christian. But I'm not pushing the Christian thing. I am like to let you live in your space will and we will live in our Christian space. I come from a family of a single mom, and a grandmother that lived around the corner and my dad who was further around the corner but still around the

corner. So that's my culture as an only child too. My parents were never married, but like I said he was mixed but mainly White. So, it's always been a space to juggle between that's why when I go down South, they call me White boy and when I'm in Delaware they do the accent thing. But it's always been a shift so I'm closer to my mom's family because I was surrounded by those type of people. When I go to my dad's house you see White people there and you see Black people there, but they'll all act a certain way. They act more suburban than urban like down south is more urban and then my parents always fought. My uncle was my age so he's he just turned 21 in August and we will go out. He looks like my dad and I look more like my step mom. So, my family has been a huge thing.

And luckily my mom is my rock. She instilled me with a lot especially dealing with my dad. She had me at 21, so I always say we were raised together. We were all living with my grandma at the time. She was raising me while my grandma was raising her.

*Sebastian transitioned from speaking about how important his family was to him and started to talk about his family in conjunction with school, and how his grandmother played a vital role in his upbringing.*

In my freshmen year of high school, I was bad, I was always a good kid until my second half of eighth grade. I listened to my friends when I should have been listening to my mom. Then freshman year I was an awful kid, just an awful kid like listening and my mom would be crying to my grandmother. My grandma was like you have to give him space. Also, I'm happy I didn't go to community college because I would have been stuck and my mom said that she was happy I went to learn on my own. My relationship with

mom has always been there because we had to go through things. There were different times where I would wake up and my mom was like Sebastian, we need to take a shower at granny's because I did not pay the water bill. Little stuff and then the water would be on within the day just like before school, so we had to go around the corner.

*Sebastian's initial college experiences centered around his involvement in high school, and the role his mother and grandmother played in his development as a person. Sebastian went on to describe his experiences navigating the PWI culture and often being one of the only Black students in the class.*

**Initial college experiences.** I did not like waking up early for welcome week. I've never been an early bird, so Forman was a wakeup call and then I realized I am on my own because my mom is not hear. She's like my rock, so, just getting up early for my classes and not knowing what to expect was tough. There is racism here at Forman. I came in during the Trump election it was right before the election. There was not a lot of discrimination and ignorance coming from a predominately Black neighborhood in high school. You don't have to know much about the world because it doesn't really affect you until you're in a different space. That was my first weeks of Forman. Understanding that I was now in a different space and since then I have become educated on certain things.

*Sebastian went on to explain an uncomfortable experience in one of his first classes centered around him being one of the only Black students in the classroom.*

Like there's no statistics but odds are stacked against you. For example, in my first-year studies class it was critical thinking. So, the class talked about things that are real and things that we make up as a culture. So, then of course we have to talk about the election because even if you were in a math class and you were talking about the election

at some point in class. There were some hard Trump supporters in that class and one of the students said Black people are killing other Black people. That is the same line that they always use, and everyone looked at me to respond but I didn't know anything about world events.

So, I was put in that space where you have to be an advocate for every other Black person in the world and I wasn't ready. So, the teacher had to step in, but I should have said something. Now I feel as though I am an advocate to speak against stuff like that, but in that moment and at that time I don't think I was.

*Sebastian not only had uncomfortable experiences in the classroom but also shared how difficult it was socially to adjust.*

Freshman year was very hard for me. High school was always easy for me. I've always worked for a grade, but it wasn't as hard because I feel like high school wasn't really pushing me to do anything. In college I'm working on my career. You have to push yourself and it becomes overwhelming fast especially if you don't have a good foundation. If I don't have a foundation or support group, it can be tough. Freshman year you try to find friends fast because you don't know anyone. The friends I found freshman year weren't stable friends so like it was just always jumping around, like at home I have stable friends.

Freshmen year everyone is kind of doing their own thing and you don't know who you can trust yet and you have only known each other for a semester but you're happy because you've got friends. Freshmen year was hard because I was looking for the wrong things. I end up being friends with people I never thought I would be friends with. I was close with the guys on my floor freshman year. My floor was very close with the girls

upstairs. I was trying to be in my community but when I look back that's where I found my friend group.

I think freshmen year is always going to be awkward. It was for me. It was the hardest year academically too. As you became more social it became harder academically. Although, first year classes were easy. I just had to get adjusted. But then I was trying to find a space where I could feel like myself or where I can act like I am at home, so that was hard too. And then once you found that group of people you started hanging out too much and then it was just finding the right balance.

*Sebastian then transitioned from academic experiences to describing how he found out about clubs and organizations.*

It was definitely on me I am not going to say Forman doesn't promote clubs or organizations. They definitely told me to be active and join a club. There are so many clubs here that you'll find one that you can be a part of. At first, I joined the NAACP because of the name, and I thought I am a member and can put that on a resume, but they were no longer a club after my first or second semester. So, then I had to find another space so then I found the Unified Black Student Society, but I only found them because of Howard. During my first year I hung out on my floor and was one of two or three black people including my roommate Jamir. And then there was a kid Aaron, who lived down the hall, and they weren't a part of anything. Jamir was on track at the time and Aaron didn't do anything except playing video games. So, it was really up to me. I knew a resident assistant named Jasmine who is from Willingboro who would always be doing rounds. So, I knew her face. She is also related to one of my friends, so it was a small world moment. If it wasn't for them inviting me and taking me to the Japanese room to

hang out, I don't know if I would have gotten involved because that is where it all started for me.

*While he described a challenging transition to Forman, Sebastian began to reflect on his current experiences at Forman and how they have helped him grow and develop to the strong student leader he is today.*

**Current college experiences.** I've always been an independent person, I am not the person who would stop and ask a person for help. Unless it is dire. My mom is always telling me to go ask someone if I don't know. I've always been that person but like recently I changed my academic advisor. My advisor told me I wouldn't do anything. She told me I was lazy. She would just dig into me for some reason and then I switched to one of my professors. I need to pick classes, but I didn't want to see her, so I made a change. I had her for a professor too, and she told me I was lazy. She told me I have terrible work ethic and she just kept going. So, then I told myself I'm not going back to her. I'm just going to try to figure this out now.

They always encourage you to find an advisor you like, but I didn't know anybody, and I didn't want someone who was going to just throw me in with a number. So, then I took video production class and my professor, and I had a bond. We would make each other laugh so then I made him my preceptor and he's right now the only person who's like this. It's different now because now I'm friends with the complex directors and staff. I didn't even know people's names who are working me as a part of the Unified Black Student Society.

*Sebastian did have a challenging experience with his first advisor, but ultimately found an advisor that he bonded with to help him choose his classes at Forman.*



*Sebastian began to express some awkward experiences going home after having attended Forman and being able to teach his mom concepts that are important to him.*

I am a whole different person now my friends with my friends at home. My friends from Willingboro they think I'm trying to be better than them. If you do not get out of Willingboro, then you're stuck in Willingboro. That's what a lot of places are like, I knew I had to get out of there. The people who are stuck there they're like," Oh you think you're better than us because and if anything, I want to pull them out with me. However, some don't want that help. Me and my close friends are always pushing each other, and we have a sense of community. There are times when you have to check certain people because they say things. So, it's teaching them when I go back home. For instance, I taught my mom about gender pronouns and she didn't understand why, and she said pronouns are he and him. And she asked what that is. I said no Mama you have to say your pronouns because there's transgender people and non-binary people who don't want people to mess up their pronouns. It is just as a courtesy people tend to say that I pointed out and she had never heard of that.

Where I am from pronouns are not a thing. Transgender issues are not expressed or talked about in the Black community. You would be kicked out of our community for that. So, I thought that would be helpful for where she works. She is a welfare worker and like a social worker. So, I told her this is going to be happening a lot now especially because of how we're being raised on acceptance. We should recognize and accept that there are differences in different people.

But my friends who are not from Willingboro, call me Malcolm X because I'll always advocate for us and he doesn't express himself because he's from a predominately

White town. He has lived in the Trenton area, but he went to school in Hamilton. So, he calls me Malcolm X because I'm always on Twitter ranting about something or like retweeting something or reposting and he is like “dang Malcolm X like relax,” and I tell him you've been surrounded by this.

*Sebastian like many of the men in this project, recognized after having been at Forman for some time that his confidence had grown and he felt more comfortable speaking up for himself. Sebastian credits this growth to him learning more about world issues because previously being in a Black neighborhood, he felt those issues are not discussed.*

The confidence has been up a lot. So, freshman year I was been outgoing but not confident. So, if you put me out there, I'm not afraid to speak. I had this presentation in class where I had to speak, and I was shocked we had to speak in public and do a presentation. I was always nervous about sharing my opinion or teaching something that I had to research because you're yourself out there for people to judge. Then over time I became more comfortable because I realized everything is going through the same thing. So, it's they are no better than me and I'm no better than them.

Now even at Unified Black Student Society meetings I'm usually leading the presentation and Howard realized I am a great speaker. It took a lot of work because I used to be timid my freshman year and if I was still that way, I would be stuttering at the meeting all the time. I've been struggling not to have those thoughts especially because I've got the education now. I have an Africana Studies minor, so I've got the education along with the politics and that's a change because I did not care about politics before. My roommate and best friend since freshman year told me I should go into politics. He

told me I would love it, but I don't really want that in my life. However, now I look at polls and study the election. I hated Trump because I hated Trump and there was no reason behind it. Now I know who I am voting for and for me with this knowledge I feel that confidence.

### **Summary**

This chapter allowed the participant's voices to be heard and for their experiences to be at the heart of the research (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2015; Van Manen, 2014). The participant's experiences were organized to examine their pre-college experiences which explored a variety of issues, including family, and the importance of their K-12 education. Then the participant's experiences were organized into their initial experiences attending Forman University and having to navigate a PWI culture, which most every student described as being challenging in one form or another. The third area in which their experiences were framed was their current college experiences. One of the most talked about experiences the students each realized that was with the knowledge gained over time, their confidence grew, which provided them a foundation to be more successful in the classroom and outside of the classroom. This collection of qualitative data has illustrated how their experiences have led them to be successful academically and socially at Forman University, a PWI (Bohr, 1994; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper, 2008; Harper, 2005; Harper, 2009b; Palmer et al., 2011b; Strayhorn, 2014).

## Chapter 5

### Findings

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the experiences of Black men creating third spaces at a PWI. The use of the third space theory has enabled an examination of the students' previous educational experiences; their experiences initially attending a PWI; and their current experiences as academically successful students at that same PWI (Bhabha, 1994). The third space theory has never been used in a higher education setting, nor has it ever been applied to the lived experiences of Black male students at a college or university (Bhabha, 1994). Applying the third space theory to higher education literature and experiences opens research opportunities that have not yet been explored to understand the experiences of Black men at PWIs.

The experiences of the students who were interviewed were captured through the lens of CRT (counter-storytelling) to provide insight into a group of students who often feel marginalized and isolated academically and socially (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998). At Forman University, Black male students are a marginalized student population due to the composition of the student body. Recognizing and using CRT as a lens has allowed the voices of these students to be heard under the assumption that racism and bias occur not only in higher education but also at other PWIs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Table 2.  
*A Thematic Map*

Main Theme	Sub Theme
Anchored Connections to Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motherly Advice</li> <li>• Grandmothers as Central Family Figures</li> <li>• Mentorship Prior to College</li> </ul>
Institutional Shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Rigors of EOF</li> <li>• Racism Inside and Outside the Classroom</li> <li>• The Lack of Diversity at Forman University</li> </ul>
A Sense of Belonging: Navigating Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double Consciousness and Code Switching</li> <li>• Third Space: A Vehicle to Sense of Belonging</li> <li>• Creating a Sense of Belonging</li> </ul>

During the TA of the field texts, several themes emerged that coincided with the framework that was established in Chapter 3. The first theme that emerged in the research was the idea of anchored connections to home. Throughout the field texts, students expressed their connections to their mothers, grandmothers, and mentors, whom the students felt had taught them the importance of education and responsibility. The second theme that was evident in the research was the institutional shock that the students experienced when first attending Forman University. Before attending Forman, the summer program EOF challenged their lifestyles in terms of personal responsibility and positive academic habits. The students also experienced incidents of racism inside and outside the classroom as they navigated Forman University. The third theme was the students' development and discovery of a sense of belonging while navigating cultures.

This third theme arose from the field texts concerning double consciousness, which had led to the students' skill in code-switching. Code-switching was regularly performed by the students now, and moreover, it was a tool they had been taught to use starting at a young age. Code-switching permitted the students to move between conversations and experiences while keeping their true selves hidden, as the students could not be certain that their true selves would be accepted. Under this theme, the idea of third space emerged at the center of their experiences allowing the students to move between their anchored connections and the PWI culture to create a new home at Forman. One of the cornerstones of their success at Forman University was the students' connections with student groups. These safe relationships permitted the students to be themselves and share their experiences in a way that allowed them to grow into student leaders.

### **Anchored Connections to Home**

Based on research centered on White students, early retention theory sought to separate students from their families to ensure that the students would be successfully retained at higher education institutions (Tinto, 1975). However, research has since found that for students of color, including Black men, family bonds and connections are essential to success at higher education institutions (Tinto, 2006; Palmer 2011a). The support drawn from mothers, grandmothers, and mentors that were found in this data supports the more recent literature (Guiffrida, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). In these experiences, the students relied on their mothers, grandmothers, and mentors as anchors in their lives both before attending Forman and while attending Forman. These people acted as powerful connections to home, where the students knew that they always had

support, no matter the question or concern. These anchored connections permitted the students to feel safe while exploring new, confusing, and stressful situations.

As research has shown, without strong family support, the Black men at Forman would not have been able to navigate the hostile environment that lay ahead of them as new students. Having strong support from their mothers, grandmothers, and mentors permitted them to safely explore and then process these experiences.

**Motherly advice.** The role of single mothers in the Black community has been attributed to the success of Black men in secondary educational settings despite negative stereotypes of single Black women in American society (Robinson & Werblow, 2012). Robinson and Werblow's (2012) study determined that single Black mothers ultimately wanted their sons to be successful men who could provide for themselves. The same could be said for the participants of the present research. Many of the Black men attending Forman University described how their mothers had given them advice on how to act in certain situations, or how their mothers frequently kept in touch to better support their sons in situations they were working through at Forman University. Sebastian spoke about how important his mother was to him:

I come from a family of a single mom . . . And luckily, my mom is my rock. She instilled me with a lot, especially dealing with my dad. She had me at 21, so I always say we were raised together.

Jamal spoke at length about how his mother, despite having the challenging job of raising his siblings, had taught him how to cook. Jamal realized that, in addition to teaching him how to cook, which is a practical life skill that now enables him to be independent, those lessons represented an important time with his mother:

She's a stay-at-home mom, so she's constantly raising my younger siblings, and that is so hard. That's a hard job without getting paid. She was a housekeeper before. So, she is always busy caring. That's her specialty. She's a caregiver. She cares a lot. She's a big role model in the household. My mom has taught me everything I know about cooking. So back home, my mom always cooks, and we help her. So, growing up, I helped my mom cook. This allowed me to learn how to cook along , so I've been cooking for a long time. Because of her, I know how to survive and be on my own.

Some of the participants reported that their mother's advice and conversations with their mother had changed since they'd started college. The men recognized that their mothers had begun treating them more like adults than like high school students. Jamal provided this experience:

My mom and I have a lot more mature conversations about life and future goals, which is a change. The questions are a lot deeper than when I was in high school. It's actually more about life than the little stuff. So, then we have real conversations, and I will talk to her about my classes and other people I meet or issues I have. She will tell me, 'You're 18 now. You're growing up. You're going to have to deal with it. You definitely have to toughen up and take things at face value.'

Howard also shared a similar sentiment about his mother seeing him as an adult and having more mature conversations with him:

I don't see my extended family as much anymore, but my mother and I have the same relationship. She sees that I'm an adult, and she's seen the growth that I've



been through and how I've grown into a different person than I was when I left home my senior year of high school.

Robinson and Werblow (2012) identified that single Black mothers spoke with their sons frequently to encourage them and help them identify positive resources to overcome obstacles in order to succeed. Sebastian provided such an experience. He described speaking with his mother about an academic advisor he was having problems with:

I've always been an independent person. I am not the person who would stop and ask a person for help unless it is dire. My mom is always telling me to go ask someone if I don't know. I've always been that person, but recently I changed my academic advisor.

Oliver also shared an experience where his mother provided him with advice about how to overcome what others thought of him:

My mother always told me say what you want, but it is all about how you feel about yourself. That's the main reason I didn't let the negativity bother me, because I knew I was going to be great, and I knew I was dedicated, and I just—I wanted to do it. I knew that I wanted to go to college. That's how it started.

And in addition to mothers providing advice and love to their sons, the relationship also worked in reverse. In one instance, Sebastian taught his mother about non-binary identities because he felt it was important to her success as a social worker.

For instance, I taught my mom about gender pronouns, and she didn't understand why, and she said pronouns are *he* and *him*. And she asked what that is. I said no, Mama, you have to say your pronouns because there are transgender people and non-binary people who don't want people to mess up their pronouns. 'It is just as

a courtesy people tend to say that,' I pointed out, and she had never heard of that. Where I am from, pronouns are not a thing. Transgender issues are not expressed or talked about in the Black community. You would be kicked out of our community for that. So, I thought that would be helpful for where she works. She is a welfare worker and like a social worker.

As described by Robinson and Werblow (2012), Black single mothers play an incredible role in their sons' lives, especially by providing guidance about the importance of education. Even though Robinson and Werblow's (2012) research focused on Black male students in secondary education, many of the findings were applicable to the Black male students at Forman University.

**Grandmothers as central family figures.** Grandmothers played a central role and often occupied a special place in the families of the students in this study.

Grandmothers are often responsible for passing down traditions and values to the following generations (Wilder & Cain, 2011). Boyd-Franklin (2003) discusses grandmothers as follows:

The role of the grandmother is one of the most central ones in African American families . . . Grandmothers are central to the economic support of Black families and play a crucial role in childcare . . . They represent a major source of strength and security for many Black children. (p. 79)

Indeed, many of the men in the present study referenced their grandmothers as core figures who helped to hold their family together. This research confirms that grandmothers have been central in the lives of these students at Forman University.

Sebastian spoke about how his grandmother would provide his mother with advice about how to respond to his negative behavior:

My mom and I were living with my grandma. Actually, we were all living with my grandma at the time . . . She had me at 21, so I always say we were raised together. We were all living with my grandma at the time. She was raising me while my grandma was raising her . . . In my freshmen year of high school, I was bad. I was always a good kid until my second half of eighth grade. I listened to my friends when I should have been listening to my mom. Then freshman year I was an awful kid, just an awful kid. I wasn't listening, and my mom would be crying to my grandmother. My grandma was like, you have to give him space.

Sebastian's grandmother played a central role in his family not only for him but also for his mother during his youth. Sebastian also mentioned that sometimes, if the water bill had not been paid, he and his mother would go around the corner to his grandmother's house to shower. Sebastian's grandmother was not only emotionally supportive but also provided a safe space for Sebastian and his mother during tough times.

Kenny also spent a significant amount of time speaking about his grandmother and her central role in his family. Kenny observed that when his grandmother passed away, he felt that his family began to fall apart without her there to hold the family together. Kenny provided these experiences about his grandmother:

I don't have as much. My family, and my home, is different from a lot of other Black families who are close and, like, they have their own little traditions, but I don't really have that. I don't really have a big family like most Black families do. I feel that my family fell apart, that structure fell apart, when my grandmother

passed away, because she was the glue that held everything together. And then, once she passed away, my uncle started acting crazy, acting differently, and he didn't want anything to do with our family. It's just a bunch of nonsense.

Though mothers played a very active role in the participants' lives, the grandmothers seem to have served as stable and supportive figures that provided wisdom and stability. In several of these students' lives, grandmothers provided emotional advice and supportive atmospheres when times were tough for their families. Always knowing that their grandmothers were there to support them and provide a safe place for them was clearly important in the participants' childhoods. The importance of grandmothers in the Black family unit cannot be understated as an important part of their experiences prior to attending colleges and universities (Boyd-Franklin, 2003).

**Mentorship prior to college.** Waston, Sealey-Ruiz, and Jackson (2016)

examined after-school mentorship programs for Black and Latino male high school students; the study focused on the cultural aspects of the relationship between the mentor and the student. The researchers found that the experiences with the mentor created opportunities for the students to be vulnerable and free (Waston, Sealey-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016). However, the findings also detailed that the mentors had to hold the students accountable and that the mentors often set high expectations (Watson, Sealy-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016). This research is consistent with what the students reported at Forman University about their mentors prior to attending the institution. Kenny provided an example of a high school teacher who served as a mentor to him and who introduced him to Mr. Kearney, who soon became another mentor. Kenny disclosed that he is dyslexic, but described how both mentors told him that being dyslexic was no excuse and that no one would care if Kenny tried to use it as an excuse. Kenny described this experience:

I feel like I made my adjustment before I got here because of my mentor. My mentor really, like, set me up for success, because he taught me, like, the things that I needed for college before I even got here. He showed me you can't slack off. He was and continues to be a mentor for me. Even now he continues to push me and tell me, 'Yo, you need to stay on top of things. Are you getting this done? Are you getting that done?' And also, he introduced me to Mr. Kearney. He and Mr. Kearney really reinforced why people don't care if you, like, have these different struggles. Like I'm dyslexic. Like, people don't care about that. They only care about the end result, like, did you get this thing done. And once I realized, like, those excuses don't really matter, it's, like, okay. Like, people don't really care.

Like I can't say, 'Aww, say man, like, I need some extra time.' Like, you don't tell me in advance, I don't really care like that.

Even though Kenny has a learning disability, both mentors—one in high school and another in college—taught him not to use it as an excuse. Kenny continues to take that attitude as a student leader at Forman University. Kenny shared that, while he finds reading difficult, he has learned to adapt and listen to audio books. He shared that over the winter break, he had listened to multiple books, and he credited that accomplishment to his mentor, Mr. Kearney, who taught him early on he that he would need to overcome his dyslexia. Kenny also shared a specific example of how Mr. Kearney pushed him to do better in a literature class.

The first grade I ever got from him when I was taking an African-American literature class was a D, and that was, like, rough. I thought I did so good on my paper, and like, yeah, no, I'm not about to push you along like the rest of these teachers just have been in high school. It's not going to happen. You're going to have to do better than this. So, the next project that I have was, uh, I had to dissect a poem, that I got into the meaning of what the poem is trying to say. So, I picked 'In the Depths of Solitude' by Tupac Shakur, and I did my own analysis of it. And then I showed it to one of my friends. This is what I think it's about, but can you read it. My friend gave me some completely different feedback. I presented what I thought and then what my friend thought. And then I talked about what the poem means to me now. And he was like, that's what I'm talking about. I had the highest in the class for that project. And he told the class, if you, like, if you want to know how to do this project, Kenny has the formula. It's not that he just, like, doesn't

like me. It's like he has a higher expectation of me because of, like, who I am, and he knows that I can do better.

Other students also spoke about how admissions staff at Forman University became mentors for them prior to attending. The admissions staff members provided encouragement and let the students know that attending Forman was not beyond their reach. Oliver spoke about how he is often stereotyped for being from Atlantic City, and how some people did not believe he could get into college, but the admissions staff provided him encouragement to apply:

I went to school in Atlantic City. It's not the best. It does not have the best reputation, and you know, there is always that interpretation that just because you went to a certain school, that there is a perception of a certain lifestyle going to public school. People just view it as, oh, you're not worthy enough to make it out to Forman or even college in general . . . I came here, and I met Mr. King, and he just that vibe. I also met Anthony, who worked with EOF. Anthony is my preceptor. He's a great guy. I met with those two gentlemen first at Forman, and they just let me know that this college is a predominantly White institution. But at the same time, you know we're about our business. We are here to help you. We want to be here. I felt comfortable right away, and they made me understand if you don't go to Random University, and if I don't go to NYU, or Rowan, that I could still go to Forman and be comfortable.

Jamal had a similar experience with an admissions staff member who also encouraged him and told him he could go to college and succeed:

When I first came here, Luke Walters was definitely one of the staff that helped me before I even got here. He told me that he could get me into Forman. He came through and helped me and told me how everything worked. He was the one that really helped me. That was a blessing in disguise. I appreciate him for helping me at Forman before I got here too.

While Oliver's and Jamal's early experiences were with specific mentors, Kenny also described a program that he was involved in prior to attending Forman. This program was partially funded by Forman, and it opened his eyes to the many experiences that he had not realized were accessible. Kenny spoke very fondly of his Champions Youth mentorship program, which was connected to Forman University, and how it provided a broader view of mentorship and ultimately led him to meet Mr. Kearney, the mentor just discussed above:

I think a lot about what I was taught when I was in my mentoring program that was supported by Forman. It was called Champions Youth. It was a part of Forman at some point in time, and we used to have these, like, mini-versity things that we did. The point of the program was to expose young people from Atlantic City to the college atmosphere and what people do at college. For example, we would go to the Fannie Lou Hamer symposium, and we would go to different plays they were having on campus. Other activities were writing seminars with Peter Murphy. All of these programs were a bunch of different things, and they all added up to getting mini-versity certificates at the end of the year. I think I got two of those one year.



Through these experiences, the role of mothers, grandmothers, and mentors must be recognized as a critical foundation for Black male success at Forman University.

Research has shown that both immediate and extended family members play pivotal roles in the academic and social experiences of Black men, often having a significant impact on their development (Palmer et al., 2011a; Wing & Sue, 2008; Guiffrida, 2005). Family has been shown to provide various forms of support, from encouraging students to attend higher education from an early age to providing advice about life (Harper, 2015b).

Grandmothers and mothers are essential and often at the center of family units, providing leadership for a family (Wing & Sue, 2008). In the present study, without their strong family relationships, these men could not have continually relied on their families for the academic and social advice that was proved to be a key factor in their ability to navigate a PWI. Furthermore, these relationships have blossomed from families seeing these men as children, to now seeing them as adults.

The students' anchored connections to home represent a foundational principle in Bhabha's (1994) third space theory. Namely, the participants' previous experiences and connections played a vital role in helping the participants move forward and make sense of the PWI culture they encountered at Forman. These anchored connections to their past created enough of a sense of safety to allow the men to explore the PWI culture, a culture that has been described as lonely and isolating for Black men (Strayhorn, 2016). Per Bhabha's (1994) third space theory, the students were able to find spaces in-between their anchored connections to home and the PWI environment, and these spaces allowed the students to explore the new culture and find a sense of belonging at the institution (Strayhorn, 2012).

## **Institutional Shock**

Many of the students expressed a type of shock upon entering Forman University, describing surprise at the difference in the PWI compared to the way they had been operating. Some were surprised by the EOF summer program, which made them aware for the first time of how rigorous academic life in college would be. Others felt deceived by the marketing of the institution when they discovered that Forman was not as diverse as they had thought. Still others experienced racism inside and outside of the classroom. This institutional shock formed a part of the students' experiences as they navigated the PWI culture. Bhabha's (1994) third space theory speaks to the importance of being able to explore a new environment and culture by finding the spaces between new and past experiences. Indeed, as the participants in this study were encountering new and difficult experiences, they were also finding their sense of belonging and ultimately using the third spaces, or hybrid spaces, to make sense of these new experiences (Bhabha, 1994). As Bhabha (1994) states,

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (p. 2)

The students had to face these cultural differences in order to create a third space, or hybrid culture, upon arriving at Forman University.

**The rigors of EOF.** At Forman, for more than 40 years the EOF program has served students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In New Jersey, this program has been in existence since the 1960's (Watson & Chen, 2018). EOF programs, which provide financial assistance, counseling, and other student services, have been shown to have a significant impact on first-semester retention of participating students (Watson & Chen, 2018). This program resonated very much with the participants of this study for a variety of reasons. Some of the students recognized the importance of changing their ways, whether that meant waking up earlier or learning how to study more effectively. Howard shared his experience about EOF:

Alright we can talk about EOF. EOF is primarily people of color. It was very different because having independence away from your parents... We had to wake up at 6a.m. every morning. We had to do schoolwork all day with a bunch of restrictions and we didn't get the full freedom to where the first few weeks at Stockton and I was exposed to the rest of Stockton and I thought it was still going to be like a bunch of people of color until my first few weeks.

Kenny shared his initial experiences in the EOF program at Forman and how they taught him to always be busy doing his work:

Well, my first few weeks were different than everybody else's because I was in the EOF program. So, my first two weeks were a little more structured. During EOF, I was taught how to study properly and how to use my time effectively instead of just sitting around and lollygagging. We woke up at 6:00 in the morning, and we didn't go to bed until like 11:00 at night. We were always doing something, so if we weren't at hall modules, and we weren't in modules, and if we

weren't in class, then we were at lunch. If we weren't at lunch, we were all always doing something. So they bestowed that idea that you always need to be doing something... Then you de-stress at the end of the night, and then you start the process all over the next day, and you do what you have to do and get it done.

Oliver also shared his experiences in the EOF program:

At the end of the day, EOF made sure we did our work. Even though we're in college, they made sure we did our work regardless of who you are, and they also made us stay focused on why you're at college in the first place. That's what made me understand, like, wow, I'm on my own now, because at first there was a curfew. I could do what I wanted to do, but I knew I had to get my school work done. I would say to myself, let me go back inside, because I would be lollygagging, playing basketball all day, and I know I couldn't do that. So that's what really made me understand.

Each student who attended the EOF program shared similar experiences, describing having to change their behaviors such as by taking responsibility for going to bed on time and being awake at 6:00 a.m. every day. Howard recognized that the EOF program was very diverse while in the program, but outside of the program, the institution was not nearly as diverse. Jamal also described how the staff warned him that the rest of their experiences would not be as diverse as they were in the EOF program.

There was a lot of diversity in EOF, and I miss it even though I hated it, at the same time. Even though I hated waking up. I miss it because there was a lot of diversity. the Associate Director of EOF, said Forman will not be as diverse after this program. There will be very few minorities in your class, and he was right.

That's what I saw. There were people from Atlantic City, North Jersey, and all over, so EOF was very diverse.

Some felt that the program was difficult initially, but ultimately, they all realized the importance of the program in preparing them for their first fall semester on campus.

Kenny described how the EOF program taught him to always be busy, so there was no time for anything that might get him in trouble. EOF continues to be a hallmark program at Forman University. In Fall of 2016, the program's second-semester retention rate for participating students was 97.5%, and for the Fall 2017 semester, the program boasted a 92.9% retention rate (Stockton, 2019a). Programs such as EOF, while providing an initial shock to the students in this study, continue to provide essential recourses, encouragement, and support to students attending higher education institutions.

**Racism inside and outside of the classroom.** Research regarding the experiences of Black men at PWIs has shown they often encounter a variety of negative experiences related to isolation, stereotypes, and racism (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, S. R. et al., 2011; Harper, 2015a; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011b; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). Forman has been no exception. The participants' experiences have been grouped into experiences of racism that have occurred inside the classroom and outside of the classroom; in both cases, such experiences are not uncommon for Black men at colleges and universities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harper, 2009b). However, due to their resiliency and anchored connections to their homes, the participants have been able to overcome the academic and social situations involving racism, stereotyping, and isolation. Sebastian recalled a negative experience he had in his class:

Like, there's no statistics, but odds are stacked against you. For example, in my first-year studies class, it was critical thinking. So, the class talked about things that are real and things that we make up as a culture. So, then of course we have to talk about the election because even if you were in a math class, you were talking about the election at some point in class. There were some hard Trump supporters in that class, and one of the students said Black people are killing other Black people. That is the same line that they always use, and everyone looked at me to respond, but I didn't know anything about world events. So, I was put in that space where you have to be an advocate for every other Black person in the world, and I wasn't ready. So, the teacher had to step in, but I should have said something. Now I feel as though I am an advocate to speak against stuff like that, but in that moment and at that time, I don't think I was.

Howard also described an experience where a professor made a comment about his hometown of Camden. Especially as a young student, Howard recognized the power structure between faculty and students and was apprehensive about speaking to the professor about the negative comments he had made. Howard explained his experience:

During my freshmen year I always noticed that there were only ever one or two Black students in class, and anytime there was a Black-related question, all eyes were turned on me. There was a conversation in one of my classes related to Trump, and a foolish statement was made. The professor said something about Camden, New Jersey, and I was really offended by it because he said something about the parents of Camden and looked at all of the negatives instead of looking at the positives, and I was infuriated. I couldn't move my mouth to say anything

because I kept thinking what if he looks at your grade and changes it just based on the fact that you said something instead, standing up to him. But honestly, there are so many examples. I learned later that professors aren't allowed to do that, and you can easily go to the dean and talk about that. I wish I would've said something about him making those statements about my hometown.

In addition to having to experience these negative experiences of racism and stereotyping, both Sebastian and Howard expressed guilt for not standing up and advocating for their beliefs. Other students expressed isolation in the classroom. Some expressed the feeling that being one of the only students of color in the classroom made them stand out. At one point, Jamal even considered not taking a class any longer because he was so uncomfortable. Dropping this class would have negatively impacted his ability to accomplish his goals of becoming a marine photographer. Jamal expressed his experience during one of his first classes:

I was walking to my oceanography class on my first day. There was a lot of White people, and it was me and this other girl. She was Black too. So, when I sat down, I just got stares, and I'm like okay. Like I couldn't, you know, I didn't make it awkward staring back. So, I just ignored it, and I paid attention to the teacher, who I met with before class started.

Brian, also in a science class, expressed a similar feeling of not belonging:

Every day I feel isolated in my science classes until I start answering questions and people see that I'm not a dead fish. I mean, that's the only time I feel like, okay, maybe I like it. I'm just like anybody else. I understand the stuff. In my

perfect world, I mean, I'd like to see more people look like me in the science field.

I understand that's not always going to be the case.

The research around students of color in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields acknowledges that there are far fewer students of color than White students (Harper, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). One of the most disturbing aspects of the racism found in the classrooms was that the faculty member would sometimes fail to protect the students from the harmful opinions of others or even ask these men to be the spokesperson for their race. Though these students also found support and guidance from mentors including faculty, in these cases, the students learned that they could not always depend on the faculty to prevent situations of racism from occurring inside the classroom.

Having to navigate the academic culture of the PWI was just one part of the college experience for these students. They also had to navigate the social aspects outside of the classroom that are prevalent at Forman. The participants' negative experiences concerning the social aspects stem from living in the residence halls or encountering other students during clubs and organizations. Some of the men in this study had personally experienced racism and bigotry from other students, while others had been made aware of potential issues of racism on campus. Howard recalled this experience as a freshman living on campus:

I never told anybody about this because I didn't look at it as important back then, but now I look at it, it was, like, very traumatic. So, I heard my neighbors where I lived freshmen year. It was a bunch of White residents of my floor shouting in the next room. I heard them say 'you're acting like an N-word, you're acting like an N-word, you're acting like an N-word.' I heard this and thought this can't be real



and ignored it. But thinking back on it, I wish I wouldn't have ignored it. I wish I would've at least talked with them or talked to my roommate, who was very close with the RA. I could have also talked to the complex director, but I chose not to talk to anybody because I just felt like it wasn't important at the time. It's weird because the place I'm at right now, I would think it would be important to my younger self. But I just ignored it as much as I could.

Kenny recalled a situation where he, as a student leader, was approached by students about an issue that they felt was unjust and had apparent elements of racism. Kenny spoke about the experience:

I've never had personal experiences where I felt uncomfortable, but I feel uncomfortable for other people who have experiences that are kind of wrong. Well, not kind of wrong, they are wrong. Recently, I had a young lady come up to me and tell me that the dance team we have here is prejudiced. There were 12 young ladies of color that tried out for the team, and none of them made it, which was weird to me, because the dance team was a hip-hop dance team. So, I went back to what I do, and I used my resources, and I talked to the Associate Provost about not even the dance team, but how there is no relevant education for dancers of color here. Where are the classes for that? We understand it's not a structured dance form, but where's the African dance classes, where are the African-American dance classes, and why is it that the African-American dance classes that we have are not counted as a dance class like that?

Jamal shared a similar experience where he felt that one of his friends was not chosen based on her skin color:

One my friends, she applied, and one of the ambassador's friends applied, and the other girl wasn't really interested as much as my friend was. So, the other girl got it. My friend didn't. So, my friend had a full meeting with them based on what happened, and they did not take it seriously because she's Black. So that upset her and upset me, because my friend was a way better contender than the other person. Stuff like that does happen at Forman. There are still issues that need to be fixed at Forman, but working through it is going to be a process because not everybody wants to actually talk about it or take the steps to change it.

Sebastian also realized very early upon attending Forman that there were going to be issues of racism due also to the political climate. Sebastian described this experience:

There is racism here at Forman. I came in during the Trump election. It was right before the election. There was not a lot of discrimination and ignorance coming from a predominately Black neighborhood in high school. You don't have to know much about the world, because it doesn't really affect you until you're in a different space. That was my first weeks of Forman. Understanding that I was now in a different space, and since then, I have become educated on certain things.

The research about Black men and their experiences at Forman University, a PWI, is consistent with other students' experiences (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, et al., 2011; Harper, 2015a; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011b; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). In the present study, some of the men experienced isolation academically or were forced to speak on behalf of their entire race as the only person of color in the room. Other students faced extremely difficult situations or heard

about situations involving other students in which the students involved suspected racism. The students in this study were able to articulate experiences of racism that occurred in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

**The lack of diversity at Forman University.** Another shock to some of the students when arriving at Forman University was the lack of student diversity on campus. A few participants had seen marketing materials that had showed diverse students interacting together inside and outside of the classrooms. Other participants had assumed that their EOF experiences, as well as the program's diversity, would be representative of Forman and the whole student body. These participants were surprised that the diversity they had seen did not exist. Howard explained this experience:

I thought it was still going to be a bunch of people of color until my first few weeks. I was shocked because of how the school markets the school website, where it's very diverse. I felt misled but can't really blame them for wanting to improve their numbers.

Jamal shared some of the guidance and advice that his EOF director had given his cohort when they were in the EOF program. Brian and Phillip, who both transferred from other higher education institutions, noticed the lack of student diversity at Forman University right away. Brian said, "I transferred and didn't start at Forman originally. I went to Walter Paul, which is a very different from Forman. WPU has a much larger black population." Phillip was very quick to describe his views of the diversity of Forman University compared to his community college, Bay Community College. Phillip expressed these sentiments:

Also, there are too many people, and Forman has a whole different kind of student population. BCC's population was mixed. Forman is dominantly White, and it makes me feel out of place sometimes. I have gotten far, and I am not really out of place a lot because I am more aware of different cultures and backgrounds.

Earlier on, Jamal explained how his EOF staff member warned him that he and the other students should not get used to the diversity found in EOF, and to be prepared to be in classes and social situations that were not diverse at all. Sebastian when describing an experience mentioned, "During my first year, like I said, I would hang out on my floor was one of two or three black people on my floor." Students were quick to recognize that was a noticeable lack of diversity in the classrooms and in the residence halls as well.

Student service programs such as the EOF program provide students from low financial backgrounds with a head start by preparing them for their first semester on campus. The data and research have shown that these programs have high retention rates and provide students the fiscal, academic, and social support they need to be successful at a PWI (Watson & Chen, 2018; Stockton, 2019a). Many of the initial experiences these students faced at their PWI support the current literature around Black male student success. The students in this study have faced racism academically and socially; they reported often feeling isolated and sometimes being asked to represent their entire race inappropriately (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper et al., 2011; Harper, 2015a; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011b; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). The students had to face these situations early on in their college careers prior to knowing what resources and sources of support were available to them. Additionally, the shock that the students expressed upon arriving at Forman regarding the lack of diversity in the

student body was concerning. This shock was facilitated by the marketing materials of the University, which portrayed diverse student engagement inside and outside of the classroom.

Unfortunately, many other Black men across the country face similar experiences, but do not always have the anchored connections to home that these students used to survive the shock; Black men without these connections may find it more difficult to move in-between these spaces and experiences and equally, may find it difficult to create a sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). The students in this study, using their anchored connections in conjunction with the new PWI culture, were able to develop a third space, or hybrid culture, as a vehicle to help them find a sense of belonging at the institution.

### **Sense of Belonging: Navigating Cultures**

The students in this study have had to make sense of challenging experiences. Their anchored connections, or family support, and mentorship have helped them make sense of the PWI culture at Forman. Many of the students in this study expressed a need to find their sense of belonging while moving through the different cultures of a PWI.

Sense of belonging is defined by Strayhorn (2012) as follows:

In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). (p. 3)

In this study, the students anchored connections in terms of their support at home and previous experiences allowed them to explore the PWI culture and use their third space to

create a sense of belonging, whether that sense was developed via student groups on campus or with the help of faculty and staff mentors. A third space is not a place that students achieve or go to in their experiences, but a tool or vehicle to assist them in finding their sense of belonging at Forman University.

To navigate the PWI culture, the students spoke about code switching, or the ability to turn off and on parts of themselves depending on who they were speaking to. Additionally, the students were able to find their sense of belonging through clubs and organizations on campus, which is consistent with Strayhorn's (2012) finding concerning sense of belonging. The students were also able to additional spaces, or areas of campus where they were not sure how they fit in, between the different cultures.

**Double consciousness and code switching.** As the students described their experiences at Forman, many spoke about code switching, or having been taught by their families that there is a time and a place to act. Very early on in the early 1900's, Du Bois (1903) recognized that people of color had to have a double consciousness in order to survive in White American. Du Bois (1903) described this double consciousness as a "twoness, an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts . . . two warring ideals." Since that time, a significant amount of research has been done documenting how people of color, including Black men, must act one way while in public, only being their true selves in private (Awad, 2007; Du Bois, 1903; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Helms, 1990; Hurtado et al., 2015; Johnson & Arbona, 2006; Phinney, 1992). Analyzing the data in the present study indicated that these men were being taught about double consciousness, but not in a formal way; rather, the men were learning about it through mechanisms such as code switching. Glenn and Johnson (2012) described code switching as part of the mirroring and dissociation communication strategies that arise when a person interacts with a dominant social group; the researchers recognized in their study that many of the participants would switch their vernacular to standardized versions of English. In the present study, Kenny described his experiences with code switching:

I also live by, like, one of the principles that my grandma taught me, which was there is a time and place for everything. I was brought up on the idea of code switching, and I do that very seamlessly, and my friends mess with me about it, because I'll be regular for my friends. As soon as I get in an environment where I have to speak a little more proper, and I have to do things a little different, it's very seamless for me like. As I'm getting higher in student leadership and as I'm

getting higher in the University, and once I get to know someone, I try to weave in a little bit of my personality. I know I have that foundational principle that my grandma taught, which is there's a time and a place for everything. I'm not going to be regular if I'm just meeting someone or if I'm doing something. I know that I have to put on my best face. If I do, I know that I will be introduced as 'oh, this is a good guy, okay'. After that, I get to know the person, and we start to get to know each other, and I can start to show off a few of my little quirks. I really like weaving in who I am, but that transition isn't as seamless for a lot of my friends.

Jamal also described an experience about how his mother had taught him to act when working in an office, or when out in public. He also observed that he could be his true self only once he was with his friends again:

No, I definitely had to change some of my ways. I definitely had to change, like, the way I acted to become more professional because growing up, like, it wasn't really embedded in us how to act in a professional setting. You have to act professional. Then, with your friends, you can wind down and be yourself. But professionally at Forman I had to change that. That really helped me see where I'm at, and now I can act professionally when a professional setting is required. So that helped me a lot . . . I observed this from my mom. She told me to not act a fool when you know people are that serious come to you. My mom, she teaches me a lot of stuff.

Kenny also mentioned during the focus group that he too changes the way he speaks:

I guess those three styles of leadership kind of speak to how we have to interchange who we are based on where we are at. We have to clean up the way



we speak to each other and the way we communicate based on who we're talking to.

Sebastian even mentioned yearning for a place where he could feel like he was at home while living in the residence halls. At Forman University, he felt that he did not have a place to act like himself and had to be someone else until he felt comfortable:

Freshman year was hard academically with my heart. If you were successful socially, it became harder academically . . . But then, like, trying to find a space where you feel like yourself or, like, you can act like you were at home, yeah, that was the hard part. And then once you found it, you started hanging out too much, and then it was just finding the balance.

At numerous times during the study, the students expressed how their families had taught them about code switching or how the students recognized that they had to change who they were in their journey toward finding a sense of belonging in the PWI culture. Either code switching was taught to these students, or they figured out how to use it as a way to keep the PWI culture from really seeing who they were. Code switching was employed until, as Kenny described, the students felt comfortable enough sharing pieces of themselves. For many of the students, their defenses always stayed up, and there was very little time for them to find their safe places and their sense of belonging.

**Third space: a vehicle to sense of belonging.** An additional factor in the students' journey toward finding a sense of belonging was the use of their third space, or hybrid spaces, in-between cultures. The data collected by interviewing these students showed that, in some situations, the students did not know where they fit in among multiple possible cultures. Bhabha (1994) refers to the third spaces as places where people can explore differences and similarities between cultures, including their previous culture and the new culture they are faced with. As mentioned previously, the third spaces only worked for the Black men because they had strong anchors to their homes, as these anchors allowed them to navigate the racism and institutional shock they faced at Forman University. These anchors acted as safe places as the men worked through challenging experiences until they could find their sense of belonging and build the confidence necessary to tackle these experiences on their own (Strayhorn, 2012). While the students were navigating the PWI, they expressed that they were not always sure where they fit in. Brian expressed this sentiment as follows:

Because, like I said, I feel like I'm in between all the communities and not quite African enough to be African. I'm not quite Black enough to be Black compared to my counterparts who didn't go to college, and I'm not quite White enough to be part of the PWI community. So in a sense, I feel like it was just always important to, you know, make sure I never lost the parts from my culture that, you know, I was brought up with.

Kenny also expressed how does not feel that he is Black enough, and he does not always understand all of the discussions in the Black community and must rely on his friends to explain certain topics to him:

I have never had my own experience where I've felt uncomfortable, and it's because I'm so good at code switching. I know who I can talk to and how I need to talk to them. And I think that's right. Really that's just me wanting to get to know people. I don't want people to see me as that Black kid. I want them to see me as Kenny. Another thing that kind of makes me uncomfortable is me advocating for the Black agenda. In my Africana Studies classes and talking about President Obama, people talk about how he didn't have a Black agenda for the nation and how he made himself racially ambiguous. I think that's the correct phrase. His race wasn't attached, and he was just Barack Obama. I feel like that's kind of how I am. I don't think people say, oh, yes, that's Black Kenny. I'm just literally Kenny. That's what I intentionally wanted to happen. I clearly know that I'm Black. But I guess, the struggle of not being Black enough or having to be Blacker—I just want to exist.

Sebastian also referenced an experience where he went home, and others believed that he felt he was better than them because he had gone away and was now coming back changed. Sebastian was not sure how to fit back into his community, even though he had left for only a short time:

Now, I'm a whole different person than how my friends remember me from home. My friends from Willingboro, they think I'm trying to be better than them. If you don't think 'get out of Willingboro' then you're stuck in Willingboro. I knew I had to get out of there. The people who were stuck there, they're like, 'Oh, you, think you're better than me because you.' And I'm like, no. If anything, I

want to pull you guys out with me. I'm just trying to help somebody, but they don't want help.

Howard spoke about how, while using the in-between places to navigate cultures, he feels more comfortable at Forman and finds it difficult connecting with friends in the same way that he had previously.

I will say that it's been hard for me to reconnect with my friends from home. I really don't interact with anyone because I feel like they moved on in a way. I kind of moved on as well. I'm sad about it, but we all gain new interests, and we develop into different types of people, and we don't like the same things anymore. And I've adapted so much to the Stockton atmosphere and adapted to my new way of living and my friends . . . I have new responsibilities, so it's been hard reconnecting with my home in my hometown friends.

As time has gone on, some of the students have realized that they are not sure where they fit, whether academically or culturally. Some students also recognized that their previous relationships from home have changed based on their new ability to navigate the PWI culture at Forman University. The students have used a third space, or a hybrid culture, as a vehicle to process these feelings and ideas about who they are as Black men at a PWI as they have made their way toward discovering a sense of belonging.

Third space serves as a transition in making meaning of their previous experiences while navigating their sense of belonging. The transition that is evident in the research requires the student be supported in order to overcome the racism inside and outside of the classroom they have experienced. Even though the student may have overcome those experiences of racism the transition from their previous experiences to

their sense of belonging is still occurring and third space allows them a space to transition. This transition is evident based on the examples of confidence the students displayed. Howard described his growth in confidence as:

I think I've grown tremendously. I've gained more confidence and fixed my act since I used to be a little immature, in fact, I used to be very immature. My freshman year I didn't have the leadership skills I have now. I was always anxious and cautious and afraid to live a little on campus. But if I could go back and talk to myself. I would tell younger Howard not to be stuck in his bedroom instead go to all the parties and try to help people.

Sebastian also described how his confidence had grown significantly since his freshmen year. He described this experience as:

The confidence has been up a lot. So, freshman year I was been outgoing but not confident. So, if you put me out there, I'm not afraid to speak. I had this presentation in class where I had to speak, and I was shocked we had to speak in public and do a presentation. I was always nervous about sharing my opinion or teaching something that I had to research because you're yourself out there for people to judge. Then over time I became more comfortable because I realized everything is going through the same thing. So, it's they are no better than me and I'm no better than them.

The research and data of this study demonstrates that the students experienced a transition from their previous experiences where they were not confident and were not sure how to handle incidents of racism inside and outside of the classroom, but through challenging of assumptions, learning reciprocally, creating new ideas and developing new

relationships through discussions and across differences, students are able to find their voice and confidence to overcome the PWI culture that does not provide them the networks of support they need to be successful (Muller & Druin, 2010). The third space sits in the center of their experiences and allows them to move in-between these cultures and permits them to transition from the experiences of high school and their first semester to develop a sense of confidence and more importantly to develop a sense of belonging.

**Creating a sense of belonging through student clubs.** A sense of belonging for Black men can be developed in a number of ways including staff and faculty mentorship or via clubs and organizations on campus (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). The present study, only interviewed only academically successful Black men at Forman, defined as Black male students with a grade point average of more than 2.75, in order to understand how these students had achieved that success. Each of the men described how joining a club or organization had helped them create a sense of belonging or a sense of home at the institution. Oliver described joining student government at Forman:

I'm even more involved on campus. I'm on student senate now and things like that. Being I'm on student government, I can actually see the problems at Forman. And people actually come to you about the problems, and it's like, wow, I'm pretty much an administrator on this campus. People actually look up to me to help to make sure things are different on campus. And once you have that responsibility, it makes you feel a certain way. It makes you feel important.

Sebastian also spoke about joining the student chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) on campus. He observed that he joined because recognized the name and knew what the organization was about prior to joining:

I first joined the NAACP because of the name, and as a member, I can put that on my resume, that I am a member of the NAACP. They were no longer active after my first or second semester and then they were gone. So then I had to find another space, so then I found the Unified Black Students Society.

Howard also mentioned how the Unified Black Students' Society became a safe place for him to protest. Howard described during his freshmen year how he became part of a Black Lives Matter protest on campus:

Another part of my freshman year was the Unified Black Students' Society. It was a rally outside. It was a Black Lives Matter protest, and for some reason, I was very excited even though I was never really part of anything like that socially. They looked at me as like some leader because I kind of led the rally. I was shouting many of the chants aggressively, and I was very excited. And then, after that, people started later asking me if I would be interested in being involved on campus within different clubs. And that's where I feel like I found my footing on campus.

Howard mentioned in the focus group that becoming an RA was very important for him because he was able to provide other students with opportunities that he felt would impact them greatly:

I feel like when you become an RA, it's easier to build relationships with more students, especially on the freshman side. You're one RA to twenty-five students, so with that twenty-five students, you can build, you can become a mentor, you can invite them to your organization, your clubs, and they will just look up to you even more and always seek out advice to you, and that's your responsibility.

Brian mentioned joining the Sankofa group, which is a group on campus for men of color with faculty and staff mentorship, but observed that it has turned into a group of men who are active on campus in promoting different events and activities for other men of color.

Brian described his experience as a transfer student with the Sankofa group:

I didn't know much about Sankofa. And then as time went along I learned more about it, and I got involved and met some people. For a little bit, it felt like a community. So I mean, it's an ongoing process. I've only been here for maybe like a year and a half.

Phillip also spoke about how he became an orientation leader and joined the Relay for Life group when he arrived on campus after community college. Phillip, however, felt that he was more engaged at his community college. He said that he cannot be as engaged at Forman because of responsibilities at home; due to the amount of effort he's expending, he feels that he needs to focus on his academics:

This summer I became an orientation leader, and I was part of Relay for Life. When I was an orientation leader, I bonded with everyone. Then in Relay for Life, I felt like it was a big family. In Relay for Life, we bonded because we could play around, and we fundraised for cancer research. So that gave us a more family-oriented connection.

The students were also able to gain confidence from their membership in these clubs and organizations on campus. Both Howard, who is a former UBSS president, and Sebastian, who was the current UBSS president at the time of the interviews, expressed that that they had found their sense of belonging now. Both Howard and Sebastian felt more



comfortable confronting issues of racism inside and outside of the classroom. Sebastian shared this experience:

The confidence has been up a lot. So, freshman year I was being outgoing, but not confident. So, if you put me out there, I'm not afraid to speak. I had this presentation in class where I had to speak, and I was shocked we had to speak in public and do a presentation. I was always nervous about sharing my opinion or teaching something that I had to research because you're yourself out there for people to judge. Then over time I became more comfortable because I realized everybody is going through the same thing. So, it's like, they are no better than me, and I'm no better than them. Now even at Unified Black Students' Society meetings, I'm usually leading the presentation, and Howard realized I'm a great speaker. It took a lot of work because I used to be timid my freshman year, and if I was still that way, I would be stuttering at the meeting all the time. I've been struggling not to have those thoughts especially because I've got the education now.

Howard also expressed, as discussed earlier, how he was not equipped to confront racist remarks by his professor about his hometown of Camden. However, after spending time as a RA and as President of UBSS, his confidence about addressing issues of racism on campus had increased:

Stand up for people and step up to people that really are disrespectful on campus. That's for sure, and don't be afraid to speak up. Check the people that are in your classes that have really foolish mindsets full of bigotry because it's okay to check people in their behavior, because at the end of the day, it's better knowing that

you said something. If you didn't say something, you will regret it, because you'll live with it and think about it forever.

It was evident in the cases of Howard and Sebastian that they had found their sense of belonging through their experiences of joining clubs and organizations. Both men were now ready to defend their beliefs whereas previously, they had not felt confident enough to do so. Their growth and confidence demonstrated that having strong anchors to home, enduring the shock of the PWI culture, and finding clubs and organizations while exploring new experiences through the use of the in-between places of their cultures all contributed to finding their sense of belonging at Forman University.

Many of the students in this study spoke about the significant impact that clubs and organizations have had on their ability to find a sense of belonging at Forman University. Creating a sense of belonging is one of the most important components in ensuring that Black men succeed against the odds in a PWI culture and environment. Strayhorn's (2012) research is consistent with the findings at Forman University, in particular in that a key factor in Black male students feeling connected is to have comrades and, most importantly, the ability to be themselves.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the experiences of Black men as they created third spaces at a PWI. Using TA as a tool, in conjunction with two rounds of semi-structured interviews and a focus group, the study gathered the students' individual narratives, which were shared via the students' own voices as the students told their stories (Smith, 2015). These narratives were then examined for common themes and sub-themes. To ensure validity, the students' narratives and the findings were shared with

the students prior to the focus group to ensure that their voices remained at the center of the research. Additionally, three staff members, each of who has been at Forman for over 10 years, reviewed the narratives to ensure that no experiences had been taken out of context. Another framework that was vital to the research was the lens of CRT, which entails the assumption that racism occurs in higher education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT also recognizes that students not in the majority often feel marginalized and that their experiences are likely to become marginalized as well (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Using CRT provides counter-story telling and offers new experiences not expressed in such a concentrated way (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

In the present study, mothers, grandmothers, and mentors had a particularly significant impact on the students by acting as anchors to home. The students encountered issues of racism inside and outside of the classroom, but through the regular contact with their mothers, and through the wisdom given to them by their grandmothers, they were able to weather those experiences. Additionally, it was evident that mentors had prepared these men even before they arrived at college to encounter the social and academic challenges that lie ahead. Without these anchors, I am not sure how many of these men would have been able to cope with the initial shock of the PWI institution.

Since parents and grandparents are such strong anchors to a student's home, these family members must be more included in the college and university experience. Recent research has recognized that for students of color, parents should be seen as active college partners in order to provide the best support possible for these students, and especially for Black men (Kiyama et al., 2015). In Kiyama et al.'s (2015) work, parent advisory boards were created in the University of Virginia's Office of African American

Affairs to allow parents to provide feedback concerning their experiences about the University which gave the University information on how to improve their services. The evidence in this study and others demonstrates that Black men must be anchored to their homes through these strong connections with their mothers, grandmothers, and mentors. The more these mothers, grandmothers, and mentors learn about institutions through intentional educational connections, the more likely these individuals will be to provide sound advice about navigating PWIs such as Forman.

The initial shock that these students described came from a variety of areas at the institution. The first experience was the summer EOF program. The students expressed that they were not prepared for the changes in their lives. They referenced having to wake up significantly earlier than before and how every moment of the day had to be accounted for to provide structure and routines that would ensure academic and social success. While the students were initially shocked by this program, though, they also asserted that it had prepared them for their first semester at Forman University. As previously mentioned, the retention rates and studies of New Jersey EOF programs show that the programs are very successful in retaining students. Just in 2018, research was done on New Jersey EOF programs that praised how high the retention rates were for this program (Watson & Chen, 2018). However, Forman can only admit about 130 EOF students a year. More programs need to be offered to provide positive shocks in this sense to the students, as such experiences can provide students with the structure and routines they need to be successful. That said, while the program was a positive shock to the students, they still needed to rely on their anchors to home to navigate this new experience.

The next two shocks to the students who attended Forman University were not positive. The experiences that the students spoke most about referenced the racism they had endured inside and outside the classroom. The incidents of racism included inappropriate comments made by faculty, similarly comments made by students, and racial slurs being used in the residence halls. Using CRT as a lens for this research entails the assumption that racism is part of the fabric of higher education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), but these experiences were nonetheless the most threatening to the Black male students' success in higher education.

Colleges and universities must more thoroughly educate their faculty and student bodies to ensure that everyone understands that certain words and ideas are hurtful and upsetting to not only these men but also other students of color on campus. There is not an assumption that every faculty member or student makes such comments. The aim is rather to call on Forman University to empower its new students with resources in the form of mentorship or reporting structures. Many of the men who experienced these racist situations did so very early on in their college careers. During that time, as young students, they did not know how to respond or who to turn to. Many of the men in this study spoke of how they did not report the event to anyone. Based on the data in this study, Black men were more exposed to racist incidents inside and outside of the classroom during their first semester on campus. New students, such as these men were in their first semesters, must be endowed with information not only about how to combat racism by themselves, but also about how to make the institution aware of it, so others can be held accountable.

The next shock to these students was the lack of diversity at Forman University. As previously noted, as of 2016, Forman University had a student enrollment of 69.3% White, 13.5% Hispanic/Latino, 6.7% Asian, and 5.4% Black (Stockton, 2016). Some of the students indicated that the marketing materials were misleading due to the diversity seen in pictures and publications; only once the students were on campus did they realize that the campus was not as diverse as they had previously thought. Not only did the students feel deceived, but they also described feelings of isolation and loneliness. Both the isolation and loneliness are consistent with other studies that have chronicled such experiences (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, S. R. et al., 2011; Harper, 2009b, 2013; Strayhorn, 2014). Colleges and universities must provide realistic views of their institution to prospective Black men so that these men can make the best choices for themselves in choosing the institution that best represents their needs and interests. The Black men already had to face daunting challenges at Forman. These challenges were compounded by the surprise and shock that the students felt upon realizing how few students on campus actually looked like them.

Another issue at Forman University is the lack of an African American center or a diversity center on campus. The Black men at Forman who participated in this study had to struggle through racist experiences inside and outside the classroom; in the experiences shared in this research, these situations often went unreported because the student did not know where to turn for help. While it is evident through this research that the participants have been able to create a sense of belonging, often times they had to find it through other students at the institution via membership in clubs and organizations (Strayhorn, 2012). Forman University and other similar institutions must create an office of diversity

that provides students, like the men in this study, with safe places where they can confide in other students and access faculty and staff members who are trained to deal with issues of racism inside and outside the classroom.

The men in this study described their anchors to home and how they have used those anchors to navigate challenging experiences such as the EOF program, racism inside and outside of the classroom, and the lack of diversity at Forman University. Before the students found their sense of belonging, an interesting theme arose about how students were educated by their families regarding double consciousness and tools such as code switching (Du Bois, 1903). Many of the students spoke of how their families had told them there is a time and place to act for certain behavior when out in public. The students did not express that they had been taught double consciousness, but tenants of double consciousness were obvious in the data (Du Bois, 1903). The students did express that they were comfortable using social tools such as code switching to communicate with people of importance when trying to build connections or get tasks accomplished. Ultimately, the goal for high education should be to allow all students to be themselves in all situations, but until the PWI environment and American society as a whole change, Black men must use every social tool at their disposal to succeed in making connections with the people they need to be most successful.

The third space theory espoused by Bhabha (1994) has never been used in a higher education setting to support research about Black male college students. However, for the purposes of this study and based on the data, the in-between spaces that Bhabha (1994) references are in and between the past and initial experiences that these men have had; these spaces can be situated as a vehicle that other Black men at Forman University

may use in finding a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Some of the men described not being sure which community they fit into, whether it was the Black community or the PWI community. Allowing the men to have a space in which to navigate these experiences and communities can permit them to create or find a sense of belonging at the institution (Strayhorn, 2012). Had the students experienced the shocks to their lives and routines that have been previously described and not had strong anchors to home, navigating between these cultures to find or create a sense of belonging would have been far more difficult (Strayhorn, 2012).

One of the many reasons the students in this study have been so successful is that all of them, in one way or another, found a sense of belonging at Forman (Strayhorn, 2012). Most of the students in this study credited Forman with promoting student club involvement and membership and, as Howard said, thereby helping the students “find their footing at the University.” Some of the students gravitated towards the Unified Black Students’ Society, and others became resident assistants and orientation leaders; in all cases, the involvement helped the students to feel more connected to campus and ultimately led them to find a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). While the students did promote the notion of getting involved, the need for a diversity or multicultural center remains significant. All students need access to a place where they can feel most like themselves without having to think about double consciousness or code switching while trying to work through the PWI culture.

The findings highlight that Black men can indeed successfully navigate a PWI, but it will not be easy. Students bring certain experiences with them and rely on the knowledge and resources from those previous experiences to overcome the PWI culture.



In studying how students ultimately learn to navigate that culture, the third space theory explains how the spaces situated in-between all the experiences on the students' journeys can support students in finding a sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994). A third space has been described as a place between cultures where people—in the case of the present study, students—are able to explore areas of the new culture where they feel they fit the best. Strayhorn (2012) speaks about creating a sense of belonging through strong connections at the institution. However, the idea of third space can be situated in-between and prior to the student finding a sense of belonging at a PWI. After examining the findings, I would reimagine Figure 3 as shown in Figure 4.

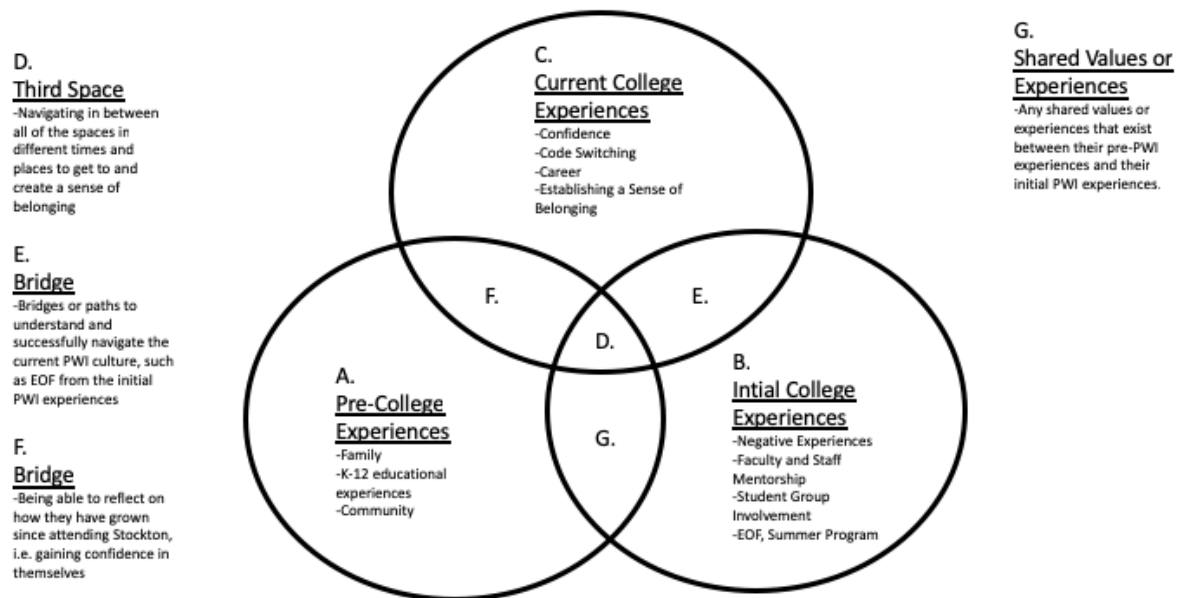


Figure 4. Third Space Theory Applied to Black Male Experiences at a PWI

Figure 4 takes the themes that were examined in the findings and situates them in a model that takes into account these students finding a sense of belonging at a PWI, an achievement that has been demonstrated time and time again in the study (Strayhorn, 2012). The new figure integrates the third space theory, as the study indicated how the students used a third space as a vehicle to freely explore all of their experiences, including those prior to Forman, initially at Forman, and after having been at Forman for a period of time.

Bhabha's (1994) third space theory was originally developed to describe what those who have been colonized experience when caught between their own culture and the new, unfamiliar culture. The elements of the original theory espoused by Bhabha (1994) are strikingly similar to the students' situation, in which a third space was created, situated in the midst of the students' explorations of the new and unfamiliar culture of the PWI. Third space theory can be used for understanding how Black men navigate and negotiate new experiences at PWIs.

While this research specifically spoke to Black male experiences at PWIs there is a larger context of discussion that is related to the current societal issues Black men face in American society. These students will only be at Forman for a short a time, and with the knowledge and support that has been discussed throughout this research, they must then begin a new chapter in their live beginning to find a career, and start a family working, while also as Du Bois (1903) has described also living a double consciousness. One of the students in the study described his experiences at Forman as;

So it's like the thing about Forman is it's definitely taught me about life because when you graduate from an HBCU. You'll be stuck because we're still minorities.

So, whether it hits you now whether it's now or in his later you're still stuck at it just a huge PWI. Yes. So, it's definitely developed to me that I'll always be this person and I have to embrace this person because that's why learning myself was so important.

This experience by this student spoke to the larger issues that Black men face in American society not only inside higher education institutions. Tatum (1997) describes the cultural racism in American as smog in the air that is so thick it is visible and other times less apparent but always day in and day out it is there.

One of the societal issues that is most detrimental to Black men is the staggering rates of criminal incarceration they are subject to and the effect it has on Black families and communities. Given, that the connection to family was so necessary for student success in this study it is appropriate to discuss generally how the mass incarceration of Black men has negatively impacted their families and communities. The mass incarceration of Black men not only damages the social networks but also places an immediate financial and social strain on the rest of the family (Roberts, 2003). This kind of strain on the communities and families can have a broader impact on the student's ability to rely on these connections when confronted with racism inside and outside of the classroom.

Research has also shown, that due to the mass incarceration of Black men, women become the primary caregivers, and must attempt to hold families together in the prolonged absence of their partner (Roberts, 2003). This is also very problematic given that a major theme of this study was the dependence on mothers to provide support and advice to their students throughout their college experience. Single mothers who are

stretched thin trying to hold their families together, may not have the time to dedicate to their students thus removing that anchored connection to home the students relied on during this study. This societal problem has a more significant impact on the retention and success of their students at PWIs than some may realize.

This research has shown that strong familiar connections with mothers and grandmothers, is an essential component of retaining Black men. However, young Black men are stereotyped in the K-12 system as culturally impoverished and in need, of being cured or fixed (Givens et al., 2016). However, community programs and mentors in those programs have demonstrated that young Black men are not the problem. The problem is the institutional and structural racism that exists in schools and society that often goes unaddressed (Givens et al., 2016). Research has shown that Black youth begin to understand harmful racial stereotypes starting at age six and they begin to experience racial discrimination at age eight (Hope et al., 2015).

Young black students in the K-12 system have described the curriculum as being an area of concern. Curriculums have not support instruction of historical or contemporary topics of race, culture or diversity (Hope et al., 2015). Not only have young Black students noticed the lack of curricular support, but some have noticed the inequity between school districts, in terms of funding, and support for students of color (Hope et al., 2015). Black students have also noticed the difference in the way White student and Black students are treated in the classroom, especially when it comes to classroom discipline (Hope et al., 2015).

Examples of community programs such as the one described by Kenny have shown students opportunities that they did not otherwise know existed and provided safe

places for them to explore stereotypes they have experienced (Hope et al., 2015).

Community programs such as the one provided by Kenny, and many others, can provide education around race, racism, and oppression and how they must navigate the system and negotiate discriminatory practices in schools (Hope et al., 2015). The education and mentorship that is provided in these programs provides students in the K-12 system pathways and avenues to learn about the opportunities that are available to them in higher education.

Based upon the racial stereotypes many of the men mentioned not only in this study, but in others, feel that higher education is not an option for them based on what they have seen and heard in society and in their schools. It is not only important to retain Black men as they enter higher education, but even before that, it is essential that families and community programs continue to show their students that higher education is a pathway that is open for them.

## Chapter 6

### Summary, Implications and Conclusion

In this chapter, each of the research questions is addressed using data collected from the findings outlined in the previous chapter. Each of the themes that were previously discussed helps to inform the discussion pertaining to the research questions.

**Research Question 1.** *How do Black men describe their experience at Forman University?* Forman University is a PWI. In 2016, it was one of the least diverse of all the public institutions in the state (*Full-time First-time Undergraduate Enrollment in N.J. Colleges by Race/Ethnicity, Fall 2016, 2017*). Forman's student enrollment as of Fall 2016 was 69.3% White, 13.5% Hispanic/Latino, 6.7% Asian, and 5.4% Black (*Full-time First-time Undergraduate Enrollment in N.J. Colleges by Race/Ethnicity, Fall 2016, 2017*). Using criterion sampling students who were academically successful with a GPA above a 2.75 were sought in this study (Creswell, 2013). The literature offers many examples of the racism, bias, and isolation that are often present in PWI culture (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, S. R. et al., 2011; Harper, 2015a; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011b; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014). Forman University was no exception. Howard, the former president of the Unified Black Students' Society and a current resident assistant, shared an experience about hearing racial slurs on his floor. He described how, in that moment, he chose to ignore the situation instead of addressing it, which was something he expressed regret over.

Many of the students provided experiences of racism inside and outside of the classroom. Whether it was faculty members in the classroom or students making racist statements, many of the students recognized that there are issues of racism at Forman

University. The students who participated in this study also noted that most of the racist experiences that took place occurred in their first semester.

Additionally, the students were very quick to point out the lack of diversity on campus. Some explained how marketing materials had led them to believe that campus life inside and outside the classroom would be more diverse. The students recognized that Forman is trying to increase its diversity on campus. But they pointed out that there are many other things that could be done at Forman too, such as adding more classes about Black culture to the curriculum.

The students did appreciate that Forman provides multiple opportunities for student involvement on campus, which in this study, proved to be a key component in creating a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). It was evident in the research that most if not all of the students found a sense of belonging, whether it was through student leadership positions or club involvement (Strayhorn, 2012). While Forman is in no way perfect, as well demonstrated by the racist incidents that occurred inside and outside of the classroom, Forman did provide opportunities for these men to find a sense of belonging. Nonetheless, Forman still has many steps to take before truly being a welcoming place for Black men.

**Research Question 2.** *How does the culture of Black men impact the students' current collegiate experiences and persistence?* Many of the foundational experiences that the men in the study described featured the relationships the men had with their mothers and grandmothers prior to attending Forman University. These relationships represented strong anchors to home, allowing the men to always feel supported. Robinson and Werblow (2012) conducted a study examining the role that single Black mothers play in their son's K-12 educational experience. Many of the findings in that research were applicable to the roles that the mothers played in the lives of the present study's participants, especially in terms of encouraging the men as they attended Forman University.

The mothers that were spoken about in this study provided constant and positive feedback to the men's experiences. Some of the participants recognized that their relationships with their mothers had changed since coming to Forman. The change that the students described was that their mothers had begun to treat them like mature men rather than high school boys. Some of the mothers would encourage their students to seek help, while others would tell their sons that they had to take responsibility for their grades and the other challenges they were facing. These men used the guidance of their mothers to navigate many of the most challenging issues they faced on campus. Without their mother's support, the students may have not persisted. The mothers to these men were essential to their persistence at Forman University.

Grandmothers also played a very large role in the students' upbringing. Many of the men described being taught about code switching while growing up as a tool to help them navigate society. The students did not recognize that they were being taught ideas



that were captured in Du Bois's (1903) concept of double consciousness, but they grasped the importance of code switching and regularly changed their vernacular when meeting with staff and other students (Glenn & Johnson, 2012). Not until after the student felt comfortable and safe with staff members did they let their true selves shine through. Grandmothers, additionally, were the central figures in the families. In one poignant instance, Kenny attributed his family falling apart to his grandmother's death. For many of these men growing up, their grandmothers served as a stable and constant foundation and a source of wisdom, advice, and security.

**Research Question 3.** *How do Black men make sense of their previous experiences in conjunction with the predominantly White culture of their current institution?* One important component to understanding the link between the students' experiences prior to the PWI culture and their post-PWI experiences was the theme of anchored connections to home. Without the support of grandmothers, mothers, and mentors, students would not have been as successful as they have been in making sense of their experiences at a PWI. These people acted as sounding boards, giving advice or just letting their students vent about the frustrations of the day. Without these strong connections, the students also would have struggled even more upon encountering and overcoming issues of race inside and outside of the classroom.

The students initially relied on mentors to provide advice on what to expect at Forman University. Kenny described a youth program that was connected to Forman University. This program exposed him to many cultural events at Forman's campus. In that program, Kenny found a mentor in one of his high school teachers; this teacher provided stern life lessons about how to navigate life with dyslexia. Kenny realized that

this program and the mentorship he through it have been essential components to his success at Forman University. Kenny was able to take life lessons from his program and mentor and apply those lessons at Forman to make sense of the academic and social demands that were now being made of him.

Other students described admission staff or other representatives at Forman who they met prior to attending and who provided advice and encouragement not only about applying to Forman but also about being successful on campus. Applying to colleges and universities can be a confusing and stressful process for parents and families, but in the experiences that were discussed in this study, the mentorship and support from the Forman staff had a significantly positive impact on the students' confidence that they could succeed even though Forman is a PWI. These staff members helped to bridge the gap for these students and explain how even though the students had come from diverse K-12 systems and were going to attend a PWI, there would be support and guidance throughout that process. In a sense, the students took a leap of faith that the staff would indeed support them; in the experiences provided in this study, the students did not express regret over choosing to attend Forman University or learning to make sense of the PWI culture.

**Research Question 4.** *How does third space theory help to explain the intersections of race and gender at Forman University?* The concept of the third space (Bhabha, 1994) was used to explore the hybrid cultural experiences that the Black men in this study have had. Bhabha (1994) used the third space to examine how a person can make sense of two different and distinct cultures, much as a Black male student must do when attending a PWI (Bohr, 1994; Hannon et al., 2016; Harper, 2013; Harper et al., 2011; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2011a; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1997). In the process of this research, the third space emerged as a space situated in-between the cultures and experiences that the students had to navigate on the way to creating a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Brian, a student with a background in STEM, transferred to Forman from a four-year public institution. He spoke about how he struggles to find an identity based on all of his memberships and about how he is not sure where he fits in. However, Brian also stated that once he found the Sankofa group, a retention group for male students of color, for the first time he started to feel more comfortable at Forman University. Students must be able to move in and out of these experiences while knowing that they have strong anchors to their homes to fall back on. These anchors allow them to feel comfortable exploring the PWI, where they are likely to face instances of racism inside and outside of the classroom.

Bhabha's (1994) third space theory allows for in-between spaces that provide terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood, singular or communal, that initiate new signs of identity and create innovative sites of collaboration, as well as contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. Originally, I had anticipated that the students would have to create a third space to be successful. However, after reviewing the data

and hearing the voices of the students, I have found that creating a sense of belonging through strong bonds and connections is an important part of students' success. Third space permits the student to transition from their previous experiences to a sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). The students spoke of an increased confidence in being able to find their voice and advocate not only for themselves but for others. It is evident a transition occurs from their high school experiences, and their initial experiences at Forman that ultimately leads them to their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Third space is the transitional area where students are able to develop a sense of confidence which leads to their sense of belonging. Allowing the students, the space to explore and reconceive who they are what they might be is the essence of third space (Bhabha, 1994; Gutierrez, 2008). Instead of third space being an end point, it was actually situated in the middle of the students' experiences and allowed the students to figure themselves out in the in-between spaces (Bhabha, 1994). For example, Brian described feeling like he does not fit in any of four different areas, but he also said that being able to join a club like Sankofa or Model United Nations has allowed him a space to explore where he does fit best. Thus, Brian is using a third space in the gaps between all of his experiences.

Kenny's experience also comes from a place of student leadership. As the student trustee on the Board of Trustees for Forman University, he holds one of the highest positions a student can have at Forman. Accordingly, Kenny reported feeling pressured to engage on issues of race and to have difficult conversations he may not be ready for. Kenny also expressed that sometimes he feels stereotyped, because he is often asked to

participate in photoshoot opportunities that he feels are just a way to use his Blackness as an advertisement for the University.

Using the in-between spaces that third space allows for, especially when trying to navigate at a PWI environment, enabled the participants to explore relationships with faculty, staff, and other students and to attend different events or clubs that could encourage and ultimately create the sense of belonging that is known to contribute to the success of Black men (Strayhorn, 2012). Referring to Figure 4, the third space is situated between all of the participants' areas of experiences. Thus, as the participants make sense of their previous experiences in conjunction with the PWI culture, they can use the in-between spaces to navigate and create a sense of belonging. Bhabha (1994) explains as follows:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with newness that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.

The past-present becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of the living.

(p.10)

While the third space theory has not been applied to higher education or the body of work concerning Black men, it does have a place in this research area and can speak to the times and experiences of Black men, who must constantly navigate the many experiences and cultures often found at PWIs. While the path through PWIs is not easy for Black men, it is certainly something that can be accomplished, as the experiences of the

academically successful men who volunteered for this study demonstrate. Their stories and experiences illustrate and confirm the research that exists on how Black men can be successful despite, as Sebastian put it, the “odds being against you.”

**Leadership reflection.** Rowan’s Ed.D. program has several pillars that comprise its foundations. Reflecting back on those classes and essential texts, I find that Argyris’ (1976) single loop and double models stood out for me, and indeed, these models were essential to this study. Single loop learning refers to changing an individual action or behavior; double loop learning looks at changing the fundamental assumptions of the organization itself (Argyris, 1976). Often times, small changes (single loop) are made to try and fix a problem, but it does not get at the root of the problem. My hope is that double loop learning occurs at Forman University by using this research to improve the experiences of Black men. This research attempted to examine the experiences of Black men, a marginalized group at Forman University, to hear their voices and reflect in the discussion on what Forman can do better at its core to make the experiences of its Black male students more comfortable and less abrasive.

Additionally, the first work that we ever read as a cohort was Dantley and Tillman’s (2009) piece on social justice. That piece and the literature that followed served as a foundation for this project and future work that I have already begun to implement at Forman University. The praxis of leadership laid out in Dantley and Tillman’s (2009) work has provided practical tools, such as research, scholarship, teaching, and organizational initiatives, to implement change. Of those tools listed in the praxis, I have accomplished three: research, teaching, and organizational initiatives. My dissertation serves as the research. The teaching has come in the form of social justice initiatives,

such as the social justice speaker series that was implemented at Forman University. In my direct area of responsibility, we have been able to evolve social justice programming from lectures to experiences students understand and enjoy. Recently, the office held a club and organization fair for students of color at Forman University to encourage participation in clubs and organizations. It has become evident to me as a student affairs professional that students still need a significant amount of exposure to ideas that come from the work of Dantley and Tillman (2012) and others. Many students have only a basic understanding of diversity, so social justice concepts can be confusing for them. Student affairs administrators and others at colleges and universities must continue to provide leadership where possible to promote social justice values and thereby ensure that all students are aware of the experiences of marginalized student populations such as Black men. While other works also had an impact on my view of leadership, none were more important to me than Dantley and Tillman's (2009, 2012) two texts. This literature put me on a path to this topic long ago, and the role and application of these works is immeasurable.

Additionally, many times throughout this study, people and even some of the students asked me, as a White male, why this topic is so important to me. As a leader at Forman, and as a scholar in the field of higher education, I feel that I have a responsibility to share and make known the experiences of those who often do not have a voice by using frameworks such as CRT. Using the lens of CRT was important to me because it provides a counter-narrative to the traditional experiences a White student may have at Forman University (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Based on the discussions and the findings in the present research, the experiences of Black men are not heard enough at

my PWI. Serving as a leader in the Division of Student Affairs and as Executive Director, I have the ability to implement and make changes to improve the culture for students of color, especially for Black men. I have the ability to create long-lasting pillars in the institution such as living-learning communities that can ensure that when Black men step on campus in their first weeks, they feel comfortable in the residence halls and know that they have a safe place on campus where they will be welcomed and supported.

My conversations with these young men, as I got to know them and hear their voices and stories, developed into some of the richest discussions I have had in my 13 years in higher education. Some of the experiences were heartbreaking while others were humorous, but most of all, I was moved by the fact that the students had the confidence to share these stories with me. The students in this study showed bravery by speaking about experiences they had never shared before, because nobody ever asked them or cared to ask them. I have learned that the men in this study are resourceful and will not be deterred from their goals and careers, whatever obstacle is in front of them. These obstacles, while challenging, have not prevented them from accomplishing what is most important to them, which is feeling valued and receiving an education that will allow them to flourish in a career. Their courage and determination was inspiring, and it is important that more faculty, staff, and students know their stories and experiences so other Black men on campus know that they are not the only ones having difficult, inappropriate and awkward experiences academically and socially.

The work to improve the culture and atmosphere for students does not stop with this study. It continues every day, from specific decisions about living-learning communities to broader decisions about inclusive student success. Personally, I know I



need to spend more time with the Sankofa group and other groups on campus to hear more about what is not working or simply broken. As a default, I am often actively looking to fix or correct things on campus; however, this research has taught me that listening is even more important. My goal is not to go to the Sankofa group, or to the Unified Black Students' Society to fix the institution or fix their problems. Rather, my goal is to listen to the students' experiences and be of assistance where I can be, when I am needed. More often than not, students just need a safe place to be themselves and work through what is occurring in their lives. Having this new perspective will allow me to work more effectively with other students of color and especially Black men to ensure their success.

**Implications for Practice.** The practices discussed by the participants in this study could be replicated at other PWIs where services or faculty and staff are not as readily available to make connections with or help foster connections among Black men. It is also important that faculty and staff at Forman hear these experiences, so they understand what it is like for these students and can make changes in their areas where applicable. Ensuring that faculty and staff know the impact they can have on helping students feel a sense of belonging may encourage these representatives to do a little more to enhance the student experience (Strayhorn, 2012). More than half of the participants provided examples of awkward or even negative experiences in the classroom. More faculty should be made aware of these experiences and possibly undergo some training about diversity and all of the important research concerning not only Black men but also other students of color. Such training and conversations may be helpful in ensuring that faculty members prevent inappropriate and racist situations from occurring in their classrooms.

Another possibility to explore is more training and awareness for the students at Forman. In many of the negative experiences, other students were the ones making awkward comments or being racist. Implementing some type of diversity training may be helpful in reducing the number of negative experiences that students of color face and allow these students to navigate their experiences with less stress.

Additionally, the institution has recognized that a diverse student body needs to be enrolled in order to make the campus a place of richer experiences. Currently, strategic planning is underway with a focus on creating more inclusive services for students of color, with an eye toward what services can be provided to Black men specifically. There

are leaders at Forman who are eager to see this research in order to better understand what services can be improved, not only in the Division of Student Affairs but also in other areas of the institution.

Another possible implication is, as mentioned, the further application of third space theory, which prior to this study has never been applied in higher education research or in any research concerning Black men. Allowing Black men to navigate their experiences freely, in conjunction with providing the institutional supports proven to aid their success, may create more opportunities for Black men to foster a sense of belonging; this sense of belonging would, in turn, greatly increase the chances that they would not only be retained and graduate but also be very successful academically and socially in the process (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012).

**Trustworthiness.** Qualitative methods, especially narrative inquiry, have been used frequently and successfully in the study of Black men in higher education (Gurin & Gurin, 2002; Harper & Kuh, 2007; Harper et al., 2009). This method has been applied so frequently because of its success in engaging Black men in colleges and universities to retell their experiences regarding how PWIs have failed to provide them the resources to be successful.

Lincoln and Guba (1986, 2013) offer four measures for evaluating methodological accuracy in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Credibility is defined as the internal validity of the data collected. To ensure credibility, member checking was used where, the students received transcripts of their interviews with my analysis before attending the focus group to ensure that the meaning of their experiences had been portrayed accurately (Lincoln &

Guba, 1986, 2013). Additionally, once the participant narratives were complete, the second round of member checking was established, and the narratives were sent to the students for their review. Also, the findings of were sent to three administrators at Forman University, for peer debriefing, who are familiar with the institutional culture and the experiences of Black men and can review the findings of the researcher to confirm they are consistent with their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Each of these administrators has more than 15 years of experience at Forman University, and even more in higher education.

Transferability pertains to thick descriptions which is described as providing sufficient details one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, 2013). Transferability was achieved by providing narratives of each participant as well as a substantial finding utilizing the experiences of the students as the data for this research (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The participant narratives served two purposes, first was to provide detailed account of the experiences of the participants in this study to ensure that any person that reads this study can read the conclusions of the work and transfer them to another institution with other students (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Second, the student narratives, also are in line with the established research concerning CRT and allowing for the students voices to be the center of the research and provide a counter narrative to the PWI culture at Forman University (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Dependability refers to following established processes and having outside parties review the data. In this study, the established processes involved the data collection tools of semi-structured interview and then focus group to bring the information collected

during the interviews together in a shared experience (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Smith, 2015). The use narrative inquiry and TA recognizes the importance of the voice and experience of the participants rather than on the frequency of the themes or descriptors (Braun & Clarke, 2012, Candinin, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 2007). The individual experiences of the participants were examined and, in an attempt, to make sense of those experiences using the lens of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Smith, 2015). Confirmability ensures that the data are not necessarily objective, but can be confirmed (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, 2013). The data and findings were reviewed by my dissertation committee comprised of Dr. James Coaxum, Dr. Robert Palmer, and Dr. Jonathan Johnson, who have all done research regarding Black men in higher education. As a doctoral student two benchmarks were completed, first reviewing the proposed research, and then in a second benchmark, reviewing the research collected and the findings of the study. Additionally, to achieve confirmability an audit trail was established that includes audio recordings, transcripts, and analysis of each individual interview and the focus group have been kept (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Additionally, all consent forms were kept, and archived to ensure that the students freely participated in this research thus adding another layer to Lincoln and Guba's (2013) description of confirmability.

**Limitations.** This study occurred at a public, liberal arts institution and consisted of seven Black men and their lived experiences. A larger qualitative study could be undertaken to gain a broader range of experiences and voices. Additionally, this type of research could focus on type of group. For instance, interviewing first-time freshmen or transfer students may yield different results and data. Looking more specifically at students who have been retained into their third semester may also yield different experiences, as these students will have gained more clarity regarding the resources and experiences they used to make it to their third semester.

Another direction of further development would be to have multiple focus groups based on the themes of the research. In this study, the focus group yielded two important themes, one of which was a major theme in this study. Having focus groups with specific discussion topics and questions centered on the different themes that emerged in the present study could yield more specific data about students' experiences. Additionally, Forman completed a campus climate survey providing a backdrop to the experiences of all the participants. Incorporating that data into this research would provide a more comprehensive look at the overall experience of students at Forman. It would also provide a balance between the dominant narrative and the counter-narrative provided in the present study, which used CRT as a lens.

Additionally, the setting of the institution could be adjusted to consider a private institution, with a smaller or larger population. Private institutions, depending on their mission and size, may provide more or fewer resources for students to create a sense of belonging using the in-between spaces that a third space offers. Also, considering the

mission of other public institutions, such as research institutions or even HBCUs, may lead to new and different results.

Throughout this study, the majors of the students were not a central concern. However, the major area of STEM did come up in the research. The men in STEM highlighted their feelings of isolation in their classrooms, where they were often the only students of color. Taking a deeper look into different majors could also change the data and provide different experiences and contexts for institutions, especially PWIs, to improve their services and retention efforts. In addition to examining majors, examining specific activities—such as athletics or other areas of participation where a large body of research already exists—could provide alternative views and experiences. Considering the large body of research about Black men and athletics, placing the third space theory at the center of their experiences may provide context to some the situations and experiences they face at a PWI.

## **Conclusion**

This study on the lived experiences of Black men at Forman University has revealed the extraordinary experiences of these Black men and the many challenges and obstacles they face living and learning at a PWI. The students' perspectives and voices were put at the center of this research so that their experience could speak for itself. Using CRT as a lens, the research illustrated the importance of hearing a counter-narrative and ensuring that an alternative experience from a marginalized population on campus was given a voice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The students' experiences made clear that the role of mothers, grandmothers, and mentors as strong anchors was essential to the students' success at Forman. The valuable

advice and support that was given to these students in various forms allowed them to face racist situations with faculty and other students and ultimately to build the confidence they needed to confront these issues of racism inside and outside of the classroom. Students also expressed that they had been taught about double consciousness and code switching by their families to help them succeed not only in college but also in life and navigating the world in general.

Additionally, programs like EOF, while shocking to the students, provided them a strong foundation of positive academic habits. The students had to adjust their own behavior in terms of taking personal responsibility, for example, for going to sleep and waking up on time in order to meet the demands of the program.

The third spaces in the lives of students and especially Black men at colleges and universities must be explored to further understand how students navigate PWI environments and ultimately create or find their sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). Initially, I conceived of a third space as a destination for students to create, but after analyzing the data, it was evident that a third space served as a vehicle that assisted the Black men as they navigated the multiple cultures at the PWI and found their sense of belonging (Bhabha, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). Situating a third space at the center of their experiences permitted them to move in-between cultures and thereby to make sense of the exciting and sometimes awful situations that they encountered.

This study is a step in the right direction toward giving a voice to Black men on PWI campuses and toward ensuring that their experiences are shared. As one of the students, Brian, reflected, “I mean, really just knowing your ‘why,’ you know, who you



are. You're here in a place you feel uncomfortable every day. Why? So, if you're going to be uncomfortable, just make it for a reason.”

The hardships and student experiences that these participants shared need to be further explored to ensure that what they have gone through can be used to improve the futures of other Black men attending other PWIs. This research, while highlighting some of the negative experiences, also shared the positive and uplifting experiences of these men. Their courage and determination can hopefully serve as an example for others. While PWIs do present obstacles, these are not obstacles profound enough to stop Black men from accomplishing their dreams and goals.

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## Appendix A

### Audio Recording Consent

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Steven Radwanski. We are asking for your permission to allow us to use an audio recorder to record your first, second, and focus group interviews as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for:

- analysis by the research team;

The recording(s) will include:

- A pseudonym you will choose
- Your responses to the questions being asked

The recording(s) will be stored:

- On a password protected computer file
- In a locked drawer in my office, which I only have the key for, and
- My office door is locked at all times.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Interview Consent



### ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

#### CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**TITLE OF STUDY:** The Lived Experiences of Black Men Creating a Third Space at Predominantly White Institution

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. James Coaxum

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask them and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

The principle investigator Dr. James Coaxum or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

#### FINANCIAL INTERESTS:

There are no financial interests to disclose with this research.

#### 1. Why is this study being done?

This study is a part of a dissertation examining how the third space theory helps to explain the academic success of Black male students without institutional support at Stockton University?

**2. Why have you been asked to take part in this study?**

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have identified yourself as a black male at Stockton University who has not been identified as not being a part of a club, organization, or athletic team but has been successful academically.

**3. Who may take part in this study? And who may not?**

Only Black men attending Stockton University with a GPA of 2.75 or higher.

**4. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?**

You will be asked to participate in two 30-minute semi-structured interviews and a 90 minute focus group.

**5. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?**

You may experience uncomfortable moments of not belonging at Stockton University, or moments where you felt unwelcomed. At any point in the interviews or focus groups you may stop, and I can provide you counseling resources on campus.

**6. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?**

The benefits of taking part in this study may be:

There would be no personal benefit from participating in this research.

However, it is possible that you might receive no direct personal benefit from taking part in this study. Your participation may help us understand which can benefit you directly, and may help other people to better understand the experiences of Black men at predominantly white institutions.

**7. What are your alternatives if you don't want to take part in this study?**

You may choose to leave the interviews, focus group, or entire study at any point during the study without any repercussions or negative affects.

The following alternative treatments are available if you choose not to take part in this study:

There are no alternative treatments available. Your alternative is not to take part in this study.

**8. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?**

7 Black men from Stockton University.

**9. How long will my participation in this study take?**

The study will take place over the Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 semesters. As a participant, we ask you to spend 240 days a month for 8 months participating in this study. Each interview will last about 30 minutes and the focus group will last about 90 minutes.

**10. Where will the study take place?**

The study will take place at Stockton University.

**11. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?**

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

**12. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?**

Explain in lay language what the cost to participate will be, if any.

**13. Will you be paid to take part in this study?**

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

**14. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?**

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at

scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. All data will be kept on a password protected laptop with anonymous identifiers you will choose during the study. The information will also be kept at Rowan University on their servers as a backup.

**15. What will happen if you are injured during this study?**

Describe in lay language, what will happen if a subject is injured during the study.

We will offer the care needed to treat injuries directly resulting from taking part in this study. Rowan University may bill your insurance company or other third parties, if appropriate, for the costs of the care you get for the injury. However, you may be responsible for some of those costs. Rowan University does not plan to pay you or provide compensation for the injury. You do not give up your legal rights by signing this form.

If at any time during your participation and conduct in the study you have been or are injured, you should communicate those injuries to the research staff present at the time of injury and to the Principal Investigator, whose name and contact information is on this consent form.

**16. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Dr. James Coaxum, Herman James Hall, 3087, Rowan University, 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, New Jersey, 08028.

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

**17. Who can you call if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Dr. James Coaxum

Department of Education  
856-256-4779

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance  
(856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

**What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?**

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

---

**AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE**

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:**

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C

### First Interview Protocol



#### Interview #1

Dear {NameFirst},

Hello my name is Steve Radwanski, and I am a doctoral student at Rowan University conducting research about the lived experiences of Black men creating a third space at predominantly white institution. Below are four research questions I am attempting to answer in this research:

1. How do Black men describe their experience at Stockton University?
2. How does the culture of Black males impact their current collegiate experiences and persistence?
3. How do Black men make sense of their previous experiences in conjunction with the predominantly White culture of their current institution?
4. How does third space theory help to explain the intersections of race and gender at Stockton University?

This research will consist of two semi structured interviews and a focus group. I anticipate both interviews will be held in the Fall 2018 semester, and the focus group will be held with those that participated in the interviews in the Spring 2018 semester. Your participating in this research is entirely voluntary and I am not being paid by any outside group or entity to conduct this research. Over the course of the research you will have the opportunity to review the information you have provided and towards the conclusion of the research you will have the opportunity to review my findings of the research prior to them being published. Do you have any questions about the information I have just provided? Any concerns or questions about the study can be sent to Dr. James Coaxum the primary investigator at [coaxum@rowan.edu](mailto:coaxum@rowan.edu).

#### Interview Questions

1. What parts of your culture (family, friends, high school experiences) did you bring with you to Stockton?
  - a. Have any of these aspects have helped you to navigate, cope?

- b. Have any of these aspects created a sense of conflict at Stockton?
2. Can you please tell me how you would describe your culture (family, friends, high school experiences) before attending Stockton?
  3. Please describe any adjustments to make to Stockton during your first weeks at Stockton.
  4. Please describe an experience that made you uncomfortable at Stockton University?
  5. Describe a time at Stockton where you felt you belonged.
  6. Describe a time at Stockton where you felt you did not belong.
  7. Please describe an experience at Stockton University that made you think of your home or family?
  8. Can you describe a time or experience when you connected with other students to learn about Stockton University?
  9. Please describe an experience in which you relied on faculty or staff for mentorship or guidance?
  10. How have the experiences at Stockton created a sense of belonging (diverse peer relationships and experiences)?

## Appendix D

### Second Interview Protocol



#### Interview #2

Dear {NameFirst},

Hello my name is Steve Radwanski, and I am a doctoral student at Rowan University conducting research about the lived experiences of Black men creating a third space at predominantly white institution. Below are four research questions I am attempting to answer in this research:

1. How do Black men describe their experience at Stockton University?
2. How does the culture of Black males impact their current collegiate experiences and persistence?
3. How do Black men make sense of their previous experiences in conjunction with the predominantly White culture of their current institution?
4. How does third space theory help to explain the intersections of race and gender at Stockton University?

This research will consist of two semi structured interviews and a focus group. I anticipate both interviews will be held in the Fall 2018 semester, and the focus group will be held with those that participated in the interviews in the Spring 2018 semester. Your participating in this research is entirely voluntary and I am not being paid by any outside group or entity to conduct this research. Over the course of the research you will have the opportunity to review the information you have provided and towards the conclusion of the research you will have the opportunity to review my findings of the research prior to them being published. Do you have any questions about the information I have just

provided? Any concerns or questions about the study can be sent to Dr. James Coaxum the primary investigator at [coaxum@rowan.edu](mailto:coaxum@rowan.edu).

#### Interview Questions

1. What traditions or experience do you feel most comfortable with at Stockton?
2. Can you describe your friends and family at home?
3. How have your experiences been reconnecting to friends and family at home?
4. Please describe any experiences or situations that led you not to join a club, organization, or athletic activity.
5. Please describe any experiences or situation that discouraged you from joining a club, organization, or athletic activity.
6. Outside of any clubs, organizations, or athletic activities, how have you spent your extra time?
7. How have you grown or changed since attending Stockton?
8. How has your growth at Stockton contributed to your academic success?
9. What experiences do you attribute to being successful academically?
10. If you were to think about the pieces of yourself you brought to Stockton in the first interview and what you have learned at Stockton, is there any crossover between the two?
11. If you were to think about your growth from your freshmen year till now and what you have learned at Stockton, do you think you have created a third space? (Describe third space).

## Appendix E

### Focus Group Protocol



#### Focus Group

Dear {NameFirst},

Hello my name is Steve Radwanski, and I am a doctoral student at Rowan University conducting research about the lived experiences of Black men creating a third space at predominantly white institution. Below are four research questions I am attempting to answer in this research:

1. How do Black men describe their experience at Stockton University?
2. How does the culture of Black males impact their current collegiate experiences and persistence?
3. How do Black men make sense of their previous experiences in conjunction with the predominantly White culture of their current institution?
4. How does third space theory help to explain the intersections of race and gender at Stockton University?

This research will consist of two semi structured interviews and a focus group. I anticipate both interviews will be held in the Fall 2018 semester, and the focus group will be held with those that participated in the interviews in the Spring 2018 semester. Your participating in this research is entirely voluntary and I am not being paid by any outside group or entity to conduct this research. Over the course of the research you will have the opportunity to review the information you have provided and towards the conclusion of the research you will have the opportunity to review my findings of the research prior to them being published. Do you have any questions about the information I have just provided? Any concerns or questions about the study can be sent to Dr. James Coaxum the primary investigator at [coaxum@rowan.edu](mailto:coaxum@rowan.edu).

#### Focus Group Questions

1. Can you provide and describe some experiences as Black males you have had at Stockton?
2. Can you describe any strategies or tips to be successful at Stockton as a Black male?

3. What has made you academically successful at Stockton?
4. Were there any experiences that encouraged or made you not want to join a club, organization, or athletic activity?
5. After spending a significant amount of time at Stockton, how has been reconnecting at home?
6. What parts of your culture (family, friends, high school experiences) did you bring with you to Stockton?
  - a. Have any of these aspects have helped you to navigate, cope?
  - b. Have any of these aspects created a sense of conflict at Stockton?
7. Please describe any adjustments to make to Stockton during your first weeks at Stockton.
8. If you were to think about your growth from your freshmen year till now and what you have learned at Stockton, do you think you have created a third space? (Describe third space).

## Appendix F

### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



Radwanski, Steven <radwanks3@students.rowan.edu>

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#### Rowan University eIRB: Study Approved

2 messages

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**eIRB@rowan.edu** <eIRB@rowan.edu> Wed, Oct 10, 2018 at 9:04 AM Reply-To: eIRB@rowan.edu  
To: radwanks3@students.rowan.edu

\*\* This is an auto-generated email. Please do not reply to this email message.  
The originating e-mail account is not monitored.  
If you have questions, please contact your local IRB office \*\*

DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier:  
FWA00007111

**IRB Chair Person:** Harriet Hartman **IRB Director:** Sreekant Murthy **Effective Date:**  
eIRB Notice of Approval

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#### STUDY PROFILE

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**Study ID:** Pro2018000004

**Title:** The Lived Experiences of Black Men Creating a Third Space at a Predominantly White Institution.

<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	James Coaxum	<b>Study Coordinator:</b>	None
<b>Co-Investigator(s):</b>	Steven Radwanski	<b>Other Study Staff:</b>	There are no items to display
<b>Sponsor:</b>	Department Funded	<b>Approval Cycle:</b>	Twelve Months
<b>Risk Determination:</b>	Minimal Risk	<b>Device Determination:</b>	Not Applicable

**Review Type:** Expedited **Expedited Category:** 6  
**Radwanski, Steven**

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**From:** irbapplication@stockton.edu  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 16, 2018 5:18 PM

**To:** Radwanski, Steven  
**Cc:** Levy, Marissa  
**Subject:** IRB Application Approved

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Completed

This note is to let you know the IRB has reviewed and approved your application for the study, **The Lived Experiences of Black Men Creating a Third Space at a Predominantly White Institution.**

Note that you should notify the IRB if the methods change or any problems arise. If this project requires stamped documents such as Informed Consent Form, survey, etc., you may retrieve a copy through the IRB Online Application System. Due to the level of risk involved with your project, the expiration date of your current IRB approval is 10/9/2019. If you wish to continue this project beyond that date, you will need to request an updated review from the IRB.

Thank you for involving the IRB and good luck with your study. Marissa Levy  
Professor of Criminal Justice  
IRB Committee Chair