

Perceptions of Help-seeking by First Year/First Generation Black Males
at a Southeastern HBCU

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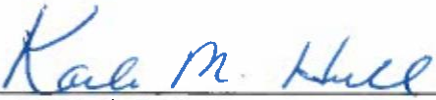
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ABSTRACT

Black males have lower college completion rates than Black women and all other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. The majority do not finish college. Although HBCUs are known for being a supportive environment for Black students, they too struggle with graduating Black males. One of the barriers to Black males' success at HBCUs is poor help-seeking. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the help-seeking experiences of Black male students in order to construct methods of helping them to build healthy attitudes toward help-seeking. In-depth interviews were used to investigate the help-seeking experiences of first year/first generation Black males at a southeastern HBCU prior to them coming to college. Five students with positive associations with help-seeking and four students with negative associations from various family backgrounds were interviewed. Once the data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed, three key findings were yielded. First, participants were taught to be self-reliant and were taught masculine ideals incongruent with help-seeking (7/9 participants). Second, every participant faced negative evaluation by their peers, which made them reluctant to seek help. Third, participants perceived help-seeking as an experience in conflict with their pride (7/9 participants) and became altruistic, preferring to help others than to seek help themselves (6/9 participants). Implications of this study called for the redirection of Black males' altruism toward interests and career paths that can increase their engagement and highlighted the importance of intervention programs both in college *and* before college in order to promote healthy help-seeking behaviors by Black males. This study contributes to a growing body of research on improving the retention and academic progress of Black males at HBCUs.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

For every Black man in the United States who begins college and persists until graduation, two more Black men will never finish (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). Retention and college completion are dismal for Black males. In fact, college completion for Black males is lower than it is for all racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010). Two-thirds of Black males at public institutions do not graduate within 6 years (Harper, 2012a). Only 35.2% of Black males completed college within 6 years of their starts at 4-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012c). These rates show a significant disparity in the educational trends for Black male college students when compared to the rates of Hispanic (47.5%), White (59.5%), and Asian (66.6%). Of the total 734,133 bachelor's degrees conferred to males during the 2010-2011 academic year, only 59,119 were conferred to Black males (NCES, 2012a).

Black males trail far behind Black women in terms of their college completion rates (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010). In 2011, 113,898 bachelor's degrees were conferred to Black women compared to the 59,119 conferred to Black men (NCES, 2012a). Enrollment rates for Black males are also plagued by disparity. Enrollment in institutions of higher education for Black males is 4.5%, the very same rate that it was in 1976 (Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013). In 2011, only 34% of Black males between the

ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in degree-granting institutions compared to 42.2% of White men and 39.9% of Black women (NCES, 2012b).

Part of the reason that Black males struggle in college is because they come into college underprepared. Harper (2012) pinpointed “insufficient academic preparation for college-level work” as among the many critical issues “stacked against” Black males (p. 1). Fortunately, part of the purpose of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs) is to admit students who otherwise might not have been admitted into other institutions as a result of their poor preparation (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). What sets HBCUs apart from other institutions is that they are committed to providing students with a quality education “regardless of academic preparation, test scores, socioeconomic status, or environmental circumstances” (Brown & Freeman, 2002, p. 238). Due to their lack of preparation, these students might otherwise struggle to gain admittance into other universities that have stricter admissions criteria, such as higher requirements for standardized test scores (Richards & Awokoya, 2012).

This is why HBCUs are so important to society. They give an opportunity for educational advancement to students who otherwise might not have been afforded the opportunity (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). And since so many Black males come into college underprepared, HBCUs could be the key to their socioeconomic uplift. HBCUs have been widely notable for being supportive environments for Blacks (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). However, even at HBCUs Black males are enrolling and completing college at lower rates than Black women (Gasman, 2013; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006). Amongst the reasons for poor retention

and completion for Black males at HBCUs is Black males' inadequate help-seeking (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Across all post-secondary institutions in the United States, Black males are significantly underachieving, and unfortunately they are reluctant to seek help (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Marrs, Sigler, & Brammer, 2012; Wimer & Levant, 2011; Palmer et al., 2009; Palmer, 2015). Research has found that Black males at HBCUs are in need of support for both academic and personal issues but are less likely to ask for help from the administrators and instructors at their institutions who could actually assist them (Palmer et al., 2009). As college men, they are less likely to seek support when they need it and to develop the quality relationships that they need to be psychologically healthy and socially adjusted (Harris & Harper, 2008). Black males also struggle with the psychological and emotional anxiety of having to live up to society's expectations for what a man should be (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). First year/first generation Black male students are a particularly vulnerable population. Black males in their first year of college face stressors that threaten their persistence, such as working too much while in school and having to take care of their families (Wood & Williams, 2013). First generation Black males who attend an HBCU are less likely to interact with faculty and university professionals (Palmer, 2015).

Counseling could aid Black males in improving their emotional and psychological health as well as strengthening their academic performance. However, even counseling services are underutilized by Black Americans, especially males (Duncan & Johnson, 2007). Part of the reason for this is that there is reluctance to ask for help (Duncan &

Johnson, 2007). According to Harper, Carini, Bridges, and Hayek (2004) HBCUs provide better support systems and learning environments for Black college students than do Predominately White Institutions, and these support systems have the potential to make a major impact on their academic success. However, if Black males are not seeking out this support or choosing to take advantage of the help around them, the resources that are available to assist them will go unused. As long as Black males continue to be reluctant to seek help, HBCUs cannot have a fair opportunity to be fully effective in supporting them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to improve retention and college completion by constructing methods of helping Black male students to build healthy attitudes toward help-seeking. This phenomenological study consisted of two primary research goals: (1) to understand the experiences with help-seeking lived by first year/first generation Black male students at a southeastern HBCU and (2) to understand how their experiences and perceptions can be used to develop programs and services that will lead to an increase in help-seeking behaviors. This study explored help-seeking both from a personal/academic standpoint and from an emotional/psychological standpoint to ascertain if help-seeking attitudes differ due to the nature of the help that is needed. For example, is it ok to ask for help for a favor, such as asking a peer to explain a concept from a lecture, but not ok to ask for help when of an emotional nature, such as when feeling sad about a breakup and wanting to talk about it? Or do all forms of help-seeking fall under the same perceived acceptability?

This study analyzed the experiences of Black male students when they have asked for help in the past. It uncovered what took place throughout their experiences that ultimately impacted their view of help-seeking and their likelihood to seek help again in the future. Once this information was gathered, these experiences were processed to generate ways to encourage Black male students to ask for help and to teach them how to better respond to other Black male students needing help. A goal of this study was to help to create a more positive social learning, through which males learn from other males *to ask* for help, rather than *to avoid* asking for help.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

Research Question 1. What have first year/first generation Black male students been taught, whether through conversation or societal observation, about help-seeking?

Research Question 2. What experiences have first year/first generation Black male students had when in need of help and/or when asking for help?

Research Question 3. From what they have been taught and from their experiences, what perceptions of help-seeking have first year/first generation Black male students developed?

Definition of Terms

Altruism: Behavior characterized by selflessness, compassion, and a strong will to help others.

Anxiety: An intense emotional response caused by the preconscious recognition that a repressed conflict is about to emerge into consciousness (American Psychological Association, 2016).

First Year College Student: A student in the first year of their first-time college enrollment; typically classified as a freshmen at most colleges/universities.

First Generation College Student: A student attending college in pursuit of their bachelor's degree whose parents or legal guardians did not earn a bachelor's degree.

Black/Black American: The ethnic group of Americans (citizens of the U.S.) derived of African descent; for the purpose of this study Black is synonymous with African American.

College Completion: Defined as having graduated from a 4-year institution, earning a bachelor's degree.

Help-seeking: For the sake of this study, help-seeking means the process of seeking external support when dealing with academic, personal, or psychological concerns for the purpose of improving those concerns. In this sense, help-seeking can range from a variety of behaviors. It can come in the form of asking for advice or insight during periods of confusion or uncertainty, asking for the services of others in completion of an academic task or activity, seeking comfort when under emotional and/or psychological distress, or any other process of asking for the efforts of others in meeting a desired personal goal.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): Institutions of higher education in the U.S. established before 1964 with a mission of educating Black Americans (Lee, 2012).

Masculine Ideals: Standards defining masculinity that are both perfectionistic and unattainable in nature.

Predominately White Institutions (PWIs): Institutions of higher education in the U.S. that comprise a student population of White Americans that is above 50% (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

Retention: A student remaining enrolled at the same college or university from one year to the next until completion of their bachelor's degree.

Stigma: The negative reaction of people to an individual or group because of some assumed inferiority or source of difference that is degraded (APA, 2016).

Stress: The pattern of specific and nonspecific responses an organism makes to stimulus events that disturb its equilibrium and tax or exceed its ability to cope (APA, 2016).

Stressor: An internal or external event or stimulus that induces stress (APA, 2016).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is its potential to improve retention, which would add to the socioeconomic progress of Black males. It can also lead to HBCUs being in better standing for possible shifts in state-based funding, contributing to the future stability of HBCUs.

This study sought to uncover attitudes that promote and discourage the process of asking for help when needed and to make counseling a more viable option for Black male students. This can help guide outreach efforts by providing direction for how to focus counseling interventions and psycho-educational programs when working with first year Black males. These findings can be used to model outreach efforts (i.e., presentations, workshops, events) to help male students feel more comfortable seeking help through

counseling, personal support systems, and any other support services that could assist them. Positive attitudes yielded through this study highlighted the types of attitudes that need to be encouraged, promoted, and supported in outreach efforts. Negative attitudes that were yielded through this study highlighted the misconceptions that need to be corrected as students' knowledge of the advantages of help-seeking are addressed through outreach activities. The results of this study will enhance knowledge of the prior experiences and needs of the population to help guide outreach efforts that will result in Black males better using the available services to help them.

Thus, this study assisted in efforts to attract Black male students in hopes of co-constructing with the participants ways to extend their support system for personal, psychological, and academic issues that they face as they matriculate through college. This can help them cope with issues that could otherwise interfere with their retention at the university. Ultimately, the significance of this study is that it increased knowledge that can lead to better retention and college completion rates for Black males at HBCUs. This research is particularly critical at this time and within this setting because of the drive to increase retention and improve graduate rates due to funding for state universities moving to a more graduation-based model.

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the topic of Black male help-seeking. A review of literature in Chapter 2 introduces the impact of HBCUs on the education of Black males, the stressors and challenges that Black males face, and the influences affecting their help-seeking tendencies. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, including the data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter

4 presents descriptions of the participants and the findings of the study. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations based on the results of the research.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For the sake of this study, help-seeking is defined as the process of seeking external support when dealing with academic, personal, or psychological concerns for the purpose of improving those concerns. Research focused specifically to Black males at HBCUs is very limited and requires further study. Furthermore, research on help-seeking attitudes of Black males particularly at HBCUs was difficult to find. The existing body of research, however, does indicate that Black males tend to have poor help-seeking tendencies. This chapter reviews the relevant research on Black males' help-seeking attitudes and tendencies within the context of their higher education pursuits.

This literature review begins with the conceptual framework, which illustrates the concepts that research has indicated as impacting the help-seeking attitudes of Black males. It introduces Gender Role Conflict Theory and Social Learning Theory as guiding theories that explain the formation of these help-seeking attitudes and perceptions. It then presents the history of HBCUs, showcases the unique role HBCUs play in educating Blacks, and details the contemporary research centered on the lived experiences of Black males at HBCUS. It highlights significant stressors as well as academic and psychological factors that impede the progress of Black males and describes possible mental health impacts on their disengagement in college due to their stressors. Furthermore, it provides an overview of studies depicting Black male students' avoidance of help-seeking. It concludes with an explanation of stigma's influence on male help-

seeking, contributing factors to Black college students' help-seeking tendencies, and social/cultural impacts on help-seeking for Black male students.

Conceptual Framework

Stigma, self-concealment, racism, pride, spirituality and religious involvement as well as adherence to *masculine norms* and *familial and cultural values* have been linked to help-seeking and utilization of professional counseling services by Black males. These research-based concepts are integral to this framework because they form a possible rationale for how Black male students perceive help-seeking and for why they underutilize professional services that can help them, such as counseling services. *Gender Role Conflict Theory* in conjunction with *Social Learning Theory* may possibly fill in this gap and further explain why Black male students are reluctant to engage in help-seeking. These theories will be used to guide and inform this study.

Theoretical Framework

Gender Role Conflict Theory

Gender Role Conflict (GRC) Theory is a possible theoretical assumption that could explain the attitudes held towards help-seeking by Black male students. Due to GRC men experience an emotional and psychological anxiety from not adhering to the traditional and stereotypical roles that society has created for them (Harris et al., 2011). GRC manifests in the negative consequences that men experience when their behaviors are consistent with or even in contradiction to the expected gender role norms of masculinity (O'Neil, 2008). There are several negative consequences for males. Firstly, Male GRC is linked to emotional restriction (Palmer, 2015). Research has shown restrictive emotionality in men to be related to anxiety, depression, negative views of

help-seeking, and negative attitudes towards emotional expression, which causes intimacy issues in relationships (Wong, Pituch, & Rochlen, 2006). Secondly, GRC is linked to poor academic performance, poor help-seeking attitudes, and even to substance abuse issues that develop in men (Dancy, 2011; Harris et al., 2011). According to Addis and Mahalik (2003), the higher GRC is, the greater avoidance there will be of psychological help-seeking. Consequently, when men experience greater incidences of GRC, they will more than likely avoid seeking help through mental health resources, such as counseling centers. O'Neil (2008) also noted that men who experienced greater incidences of GRC viewed help-seeking for psychological reasons in a more negative light than those with lower GRC. The result of Male GRC can produce a snowball effect. Due to GRC, men avoid asking for help, which ultimately leads to even bigger problems for which they need help. Only, that help is unlikely to be sought because of the conflict.

Particularly insightful to this study, Vogel et al. (2011) conducted a multicultural study to investigate male's adherence to dominate masculine norms in the U.S. and their resulting attitudes towards help-seeking and counseling. The study included Black males amongst its sample of 4,773 men and found that Black males were more approving and encouraging of masculine norms than were European American males. This study, however, was focused on noncollege-age men. Further study is needed to investigate whether this applies to Black males at HBCUs.

Social Learning Theory as a Sub-Theory

Social Learning Theory is a theory that emphasizes learning through societal observations within one's environment. According to the theory, individuals observe the behaviors of similar individuals within their environment. If they perceive the outcomes

of those behaviors to yield favorable and socially acceptable results, then they are likely to adopt the behaviors themselves.

According to Bandura (1977),

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do.

Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling; from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.

Because people can learn from example what to do, at least in approximate form, before performing any behavior, they are spared needless errors. (p. 22)

Essentially in Social Learning Theory, the observer imitates the behavior of the observed to serve as a model. This model provides them with an example for how to behave and how to also generate favorable outcomes in their social environment. This study posits that in their earlier experiences Black males may have observed negative outcomes when seeing other males ask for help or may have observed positive social responses from resisting help, which reinforced the notion that help-seeking should be avoided.

Influence of Social Learning on Gender Roles/Norms

Early research by Newberger (1999) provided evidence that boys and girls begin their childhood showing similar displays of emotion. In terms of emotional expression, there is not a significant difference between the sexes at the very early stages of childhood. Through their socialization as they experience life, however, boys then are taught to suppress their emotions. This socialization comes through the media,

observation of their parents who are their earliest mentors, and through play activities. Newberger (1999) also made note of how young boys were belittled when they opened up about their emotions and expressed vulnerability and that they quickly learned this vulnerable expression of behavior was not well received by their peers.

Hammer, Vogel, and Heimerdinger-Edwards (2013) made a connection between the social learning described in Newberger's (1999) research and how males conform to gender role norms. Hammer et al. (2013) pointed out that this was a form of social learning and related this social learning to the pressures males face to conform to masculine norms. He made this connection through research on conformity to masculine norms found by Mahalik et al. (2003) and Smith, Tran, and Thompson (2008), which found that "conformity to masculine norms and the resultant conflict consistently correlate with negative attitudes toward counseling and an unwillingness to seek it" (as cited in Hammer et al., 2013, p. 65). Through social learning, males learn what happens when they choose to or choose not to conform to masculine norms, and the responses they receive from their peers reinforce masculine norms. Over time, this goes on to shape their negative attitudes towards help-seeking and the use of such help services as counseling.

The implication of this research is the possibility that it is through this social learning that males learn to conform to the masculine norms, the very norms that lead to gender conflict when they are in contradiction. For this reason, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) was used as a sub-theory to inform this study.

History of HBCUs

During a national climate clouded by racism, discrimination and segregation, HBCUs were established with the purpose of providing education to Black Americans who were disenfranchised and denied access. The majority of HBCUs were established after the Civil War, during the mid to late 1800s (Redd, 1998). However, even prior to the Civil War, institutions had already been in place to provide basic skills and religious education to Blacks who were free (Gasman & Tudico, 2008; Redd, 1998). Among these first institutions were the Institute for Colored Youth founded in 1837 in Pennsylvania, the Ashmun Institute founded in 1854 also in Pennsylvania, and Wilberforce University founded in 1856 in Ohio (Gasman & Tudico, 2008; Redd, 1998). These could be considered the first HBCUs (Redd, 1998). During this period in history, however, slavery limited the educational freedoms and opportunities of Blacks. Slavery, coupled with a lack of revenue, halted the success and growth of these early institutions (Redd, 1998).

HBCUs had more opportunity to thrive post-Civil War after slavery had been abolished. Slaves were now free and several HBCUs, primarily in the South, were established to provide them access to education (Redd, 1998). Among these included Howard University, Atlanta University, St. Augustine's College, Fisk University, Johnson C. Smith University, Tougaloo College, Dillard University, and Talladega College (Redd, 1998). Before they were freed, slavery had deprived many Blacks of a formal education, so these institutions' purpose was to provide Blacks with a basic primary and secondary education rather than a post-secondary education (Gasman & Tudico 2008). Albritton (2012) noted that these HBCUs were not only paramount to the

basic education of Black Americans, but also to their activism since Blacks were able to use the education and skills they acquired at HBCUs to advocate for their rights and equality. These HBCUs were instituted through the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau (a federal agency designed to aid freed slaves), white abolitionists and philanthropists, and Black churches, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Gasman, 2013). These historical and culture-shifting institutions still exist today, although some currently function under different names.

During this time, HBCUs were by large the only option if Black Americans desired a higher education because Blacks were not allowed in schools in which Whites were predominately taught (Redd, 1998). In 1862, however, came the passing of the Morrill Act, which provided each state with land grants to establish public institutions (Redd, 1998). While this led to the birth of several state colleges and universities, it did not have much benefit for Blacks, as they were still not allowed at these schools due to segregation (Redd, 1998). Yet in 1890, the Second Morrill Act was passed into law, which created a pivotal turning point for HBCUs (Redd, 1998). The Second Morrill Act required that each state either not consider race in their admissions process or establish a separate institution for Black Americans (Gasman & Tudico, 2008; Redd, 1998). Additionally, the Second Morrill Act required that these separate institutions for Black Americans also be provided with equal funding.

Although the Second Morrill Act called for equal funding for Black institutions, the reality was that HBCUs were provided with less financial support and less than equal resources than were predominately White institutions (Gasman & Tudico, 2008; Redd, 1998). These HBCUS would have struggled severely had it not been for the financial

support of churches, philanthropists and foundations (Redd, 1998). Nonetheless, 19 HBCUs were established as a result of the Second Morrill Act, and this law opened the door for the creation of public HBCUS, as HBCUs before then were private institutions (Redd, 1998).

Segregation remained widely enforced in schools, even being upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case in 1896. The ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* supported the constitutionality of segregation and called for public facilities, including educational institutions, to be treated as “separate but equal” (Anderson, 1988). However, just as with the Second Morrill Act, Black institutions were not provided the equal treatment and financial support that they should have been given (Anderson, 1988). Despite segregation, HBCUs continued to grow, providing training to more than half of all Black teachers through the 1910s and even increasing in enrollment throughout the Great Depression (Redd, 1998). By this time HBCUs, such as Howard University and Meharry Medical College, had progressed to providing professional degrees, and offerings at other HBCUs had expanded to provide both undergraduate and graduate programs (Redd, 1998). Up until 1964, HBCUs continued to be set up to advance the educational pursuits of Blacks (Gasman, 2013).

The Civil Rights Movement achieved the integration of Blacks into predominately White schools. As a result of the *Brown v. the Board of Education* case, the Supreme Court in 1954 ruled “separate but equal” institutions as unconstitutional (Brown, 2001). However, in several southern and bordering states, segregation continued in higher education institutions until the passing of the *Civil Rights Act* in 1964 (Brown, 2001). The *Civil Rights Act* ruled that any discrimination based upon race, color, religion, sex, or

national origin was unconstitutional and further enforced the desegregation of postsecondary institutions (Brown, 2001). Lawsuits could now be filed to protect Black Americans against such discriminations (Brown, 2001). Additionally, the *Civil Rights Act* limited funding to institutions that attempted to remain segregated (Brown, 2001). Limiting this funding provided further encouragement for institutions to desegregate.

While the *Civil Rights Act* opened the door for Blacks to attend all post-secondary institutions, one consequence was that it resulted in a drastic decline in the enrollment numbers of Blacks at HBCUs (Redd, 1998). As more Blacks were admitted into now desegregated PWIs, less began attending HBCUs (Redd, 1998). The enrollment of Black Americans at HBCUS went from being 90% prior to 1954, to 70% by the early 1960s, and then drastically dwindled to about 20% by 1980 (Freeman & McDonald, 2004; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). By 1990, the enrollment was only about 17% (Hoffman, Snyder, & Sonnenberg, 1992). More presently, there exist 100 HBCUs, and these account for about 8% of all Black Americans enrolled in college in the U.S. (NCES, 2016). Although having decreased in enrollment numbers since the Civil Rights Movement, HBCUs still offer several benefits to the Black community.

Benefits of HBCUs

Early research has shown that HBCUs present environments where Black students feel supported, have more confidence in their abilities academically, and are overall more pleased with their educational experience (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Yet despite this research, there still remains a lack of focus on Black male achievement specifically at HBCUs. The bulk of the existing research on the experiences of Black males in college has focused on the lived

experiences of those Black males who are enrolled at PWIs rather than those at HBCUs, for which there has been limited knowledge (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006). Additionally, research on Black male achievement in particular has focused more on understanding the challenges faced by Black males at PWIs (Harper & Gasman, 2008).

The reason that lack of research specifically focused to HBCUs is a pressing issue is because HBCUs play a key role in educating Blacks. More than 16% of all undergraduate degrees earned by Black students (male and female) are awarded by HBCUs, even though HBCUs only account for 3% of all institutions of higher education in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The benefits of HBCUs for Blacks do not just end at undergraduate degrees. When it comes to Black undergraduates (male and female), graduates of HBCUs are more likely to go on to attend graduate and professional schools than are graduates of PWIs (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). According to Lundy-Wagner (2013) 11% of master's degrees and first professional degrees awarded to Black students were awarded from HBCUs from 2007-2008. Research contributing to the success of HBCUs can lead to advancement for Black students. The implications of this success can include greater degree attainment and education, increased employment rates and higher wages, increased socioeconomic status, and lower incarceration rates, all which could improve situations not only for this population but also for our economy.

Awareness of this lack in knowledge at HBCUs has resulted in more contemporary research on Black males at HBCUs. The following section will review the contemporary literature on factors that inhibit Black males' academic progress and degree attainment.

The Stress of Black Males in College

Stress has long been known to have several negative ramifications on both the mind and body (Cohen, Kessler, & Gordon, 1995). Stress increases the risk of physical illnesses and compromises an individual's mental health, leading to emotional issues such as anxiety and depression (Cohen, Kessler, & Gordon, 1995). Additionally, early research has revealed that stress has negative ramifications on cognitive ability, affecting an individual's ability to process information, remember information, reason, and carry out basic functions related to thinking (Glass & Singer, 1972). This is particularly concerning for a college student who has to rely on their cognitive skills daily in order to meet the challenges of their academic requirements. It has also long been known that men are less likely than women to seek support when stressed as well as less likely than women to feel satisfied with the level of support they have when they are stressed (Rosenfield, 1999).

For Black males in college, stress can have a very damaging impact on their psychological health, even affecting their functioning (Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007). Whether Black males attend HBCUs or PWIs, they both experience stress. However, they tend to have different sources of stress due to their institution types and experiences in college. Multiple studies have investigated the impact of stress on Black males at different institution types.

First, Black students' academic underperformance can become a major source of stress. Negga, Applewhite, and Livingston (2007) conducted a quantitative study to uncover the most significant stressors experienced by students at a HBCU and PWI and to compare the results of the different types of institutions. The data was analyzed using

results from the Student Stress Survey, and the analysis included a sample of 344 predominately Black students from a HBCU as well as 165 White students from a PWI. Low grades, missed class, and inadequate time management, all attributes of poor academic performance, were amongst the top five emotional stressors reported amongst the students within the sample. The study also pointed out that Black students, regardless of whether they were enrolled at a HBCU or PWI, experienced greater levels of stress related to their academics.

The other top stressors for students uncovered through this study were grief from the death of a loved one and relationship issues. The study also found that Black students at a HBCU experienced even more stress from these two interpersonal issues than those at a PWI. These are two major sources of stress that could be ameliorated if Black males were inclined to use professional help services, such as counseling.

Williams and Justice (2010) also pointed out that financial constraints are one of the most significant stressors for Black males attending HBCUs in addition to the stress that accompanies having to care for family members. All of these findings are significant because stress is the number one health issue that hinders the academic performance of college students (American College Health Association, 2009). It has been proven that for college students, stress has a negative effect on both academic performance and retention (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Kerr, Johnson, Gans, & Krumrine, 2004; Lee, Olson, Locke, Michelson, & Odes, 2009).

Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, and Stanley (2007) examined the stressful life events experienced by Black males at both an HBCU and a PWI through focus group discussions. This study also investigated the effect that their stress had on their mental

health. The study included a sample of 46 participants at each type of institution. Both groups of Black males reported experiencing significant stress. Interestingly, one of the themes that emerged from this study was that help-seeking was a stressor for Black males. This theme was present in the focus groups from both the HBCU and PWI, and it was mentioned frequently in the focus group discussions.

The major difference between the two groups in this study was that Black males' stress at the HBCU was mostly related to events that did not have to do with school. The themes that dominated the focus group discussions for Black males at the HBCU were stressors having to do with their image and how society views them as Black men as well their lack of resources for advancement. These males also dealt with stress stemming from personal circumstances, such as having to take care of family members back at home even while they are in college. Many of these men were first generation college students and had to deal with the stress of being good role models and setting the right example for the younger children in their families. They dealt with the stress of having to manage their academic performance while also having to maintain their small businesses and side jobs that helped keep money in their pockets. Many of these males were stressed about money and bills, and they had to balance side jobs such as yard work, cutting hair, making music, and other ventures. The stress of having to keep all of this in balance often led to them questioning whether or not they should even remain in school. This shows that Black males at HBCUs often have to juggle many other outside responsibilities in addition to being college students. The stress of having to carry the load of these responsibilities can interfere with their functioning and threaten their performance in school.

For Black males at the PWI, however, their stress was mostly related to events having to do specifically with school. The themes that dominated the discussions for Black males at the PWI were stressors having to do with acceptance, cultural conflict, social support, and racism and discrimination. Stress due to racism and discrimination was found to be very prominent for Black males at the PWI, and this is a finding that has been backed by other studies.

The racial climate of PWIs is a source of major stress for Black males. Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) conducted a study examining the experiences of 661 Black males to further understand the effect of racism on the stress of Black males at PWIs. The study found that as Black males progressed academically, the racism and resulting treatment they experienced accounted for even more of their stress. The study described this stress as affecting Black males emotionally, psychologically, and even physiologically and referred to it as a “racial battle fatigue” (Hung & Franklin, 2011, p. 63).

The racism that Black males may experience in day to day situations can very well lead to immense stress (Tovar-Murray & Munley, 2007). Research has cited racism as a major stressor for Black males, leading to physical ailments as well as a psychological problems (Tovar-Murray & Munley, 2007; Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002; Harrel, 2000). Perceived racism has a negative impact on the help-seeking attitudes and behaviors of Black males and is a deterrent from them seeking counseling services (Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2008; Jarrett, Bellamy, & Adeyemi, 2007; Beirman, 2006). Ironically, perceived racism leads to problems that require help but also leads to distrust of help centers that could help with the problems (Beirman, 2006).

Additionally, the racial discrimination they may face on a daily basis results in lower perceptions of the availability of support systems, leading to Black students being less inclined to seek help (Prelow et al., 2006).

It's important to note that although studies have attributed stress from racism and discrimination only to Black males attending PWIs, Black males at HBCUs may still not be completely free of this stress. "While Blacks males at a PWI are constantly exposed to an environment where they are the minority, Black males at a HBCU are in an environment where they are the majority but become the minority when they leave campus" (Mincey, Alfonso, Hackney, & Luque, 2015, p. 325). Black males, even if they attend HBCUs, still may have to confront racism and discrimination when they step foot outside of their campuses, and this could be a contribution to their stress as well.

The pressure to conform to what society expects of men can be another source of stress for Black males in college. Mincey et al. (2015) conducted a study on Black males at both an HBCU and a PWI to investigate how their perceptions of masculinity affected the way they coped. Among the findings of this study was that Black males who attend HBCUs are more likely to subscribe to how mainstream society views masculinity. Being that this adherence comes with complicated and unhealthy gender role norms, the pressure to meet mainstream society's views of masculinity often led to these males disengaging from areas in their lives in order to cope. Disengagement thus became their coping strategy. Many of these males reported having to disengage sometimes just in order to deal with the stress and anxiety of being a Black man.

Generally, stress comes in two different forms. These two forms of stress are called "eustress" and "distress" ("Eustress vs Distress," 2010). Eustress is the good form

of stress. It can act as a great source of motivation or incentive to reach goals and accomplish tasks (“Eustress vs Distress,” 2010). An example of eustress for a typical college student would be having an important upcoming exam. The eustress would create the motivational drive to study and prepare for the exam in order to make a high grade on it. This is what makes it a positive form of stress. Distress on the other hand is the bad form of stress. An example of distress for a college student, for example, would be suffering a loss and not knowing how to grieve through it. Distress can result in poor decision making, tension in the body, physiological issues, substance abuse, and engagement in negative ways of coping (“Eustress vs Distress,” 2010).

The problem with the stressors that have been found to affect Black males in college is that many of these stressors are not sources of good stress or eustress. Instead, these are heavy stressors that can become overwhelming, causing distress. Dealing with racism and racial discrimination on a daily basis, having to form one’s own identity while also navigating through society’s pressures of what a man should be, and having to work to the point in which it becomes a struggle to even remain in school are very overwhelming circumstances. These are negative forms of stress that can make Black males even more vulnerable in college, whether they choose to attend PWIs or HBCUs.

Wood and Williams (2013) took a closer look at Black males’ stress and the role it plays on Black males being able to persist through college. In a study exploring the factors contributing to persistence amongst first year Black males at a community college, life stress was found to have a negative effect on college persistence. Life stress was defined as any “major life stressing event occurring within the past two years” (Wood & Williams, 2013, p. 18). Life stress was measured on three levels (never,

sometimes, and often), and for each level that life stress occurred, college persistence dropped by over 25%.

Also measured in this study was the impact of a leading stressor associated with Black males who attend HBCUs, which was supporting others while in college. The findings revealed that Black males who had the responsibility of having to support other people while they were in college experienced a drop of almost 75% in their college persistence.

In addition, Wood and Williams (2013) measured a second leading stressor for Black males at HBCUs, which was working while in college. While it was found that having to work encouraged college persistence and motivated Black males to excel in college, when they worked too much (21 to 30 hours per week), this positive impact seemed to disappear. At this point, their employment began to conflict with their persistence.

These findings, although they were conducted with students at a community college, can paint a picture of how some of the major stressors for Black males attending HBCUs could threaten their retention. Furthermore, one area of this study in particular illustrated the importance of help-seeking for Black males and how it can improve their retention. When Black males sought academic advising for help, they were more likely to persist through college. Just as with life stress, meeting with an academic advisor was measured on three levels (never, sometimes, and often), and with each level that Black males sought advisement, their odds of persistence increased by almost 40%.

An implication of this study was that faculty, counselors, and advisors can significantly enhance the support systems of first year Black males, helping them to

navigate through barriers that could threaten their ability to remain in college. Not only did this study highlight the importance of academic advising in retaining Black males, but it also highlighted the importance of Black males being aided by campus support services, such as counseling and retention programs to help them cope with the obstacles that life confronts them with. Thus, this study confirmed the significance of help-seeking for Black males in college.

Current Stress Trends

Current trends regarding mental health show that college students all over the nation are lacking the emotional skills to cope with stress, even when their stressors are minor (Weaver, 2016). The American College Health Association (as cited in Weaver, 2016) recently published a national survey that revealed that over the last year, one in six students in college has seen a mental health clinician for anxiety. These students struggled with symptoms such as feeling overwhelmed by stress, feelings of panic, rapid heartbeat, and insomnia. Another study, conducted by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (as cited in Weaver, 2016), revealed that as high as 47.4% of the students who were surveyed struggled with anxiety issues.

Weaver (2016) pointed out that Black college students, particularly those in STEM majors are often stressed, with racism being a major cause of their stress. Weaver (2016) also noted that across the nation, Black students are lacking Black counselors at their institutions to talk to. They are often responded to insensitively, and their issues when expressed are minimized. In fact, much of the stress of Black college students is emotional pain stemming from racism, but they are often fed harmful messages such as being told to “suck up the pain and just deal with it.” This treatment leaves Black college

students with no outlet to process how they feel, with their only alternative being to hold it in, which only further increases their anxiety.

Weaver (2016) also highlighted that Black students at HBCUs are affected by high levels of stress and anxiety unique to their environment. Black students at HBCUs, both male and female, tend to have very caring relationships with their professors and as a result, often feel stressed from not wanting to let their professors down. Their stress also comes from the pressures of having to dispel stereotypes of intellectual inferiority, with many of them feeling they have to work harder just because they go to an HBCU. This research indicates that stress has become a glaring issue, for which help is greatly needed.

Academic and Psychological Factors Impacting Progress at HBCUs

Black males face alarming graduation rates at HBCUs. Kimbrough and Harper (2006) found there to be a huge disparity even between the sexes at HBCUS, with Black female students graduating at two to three times the rates of Black male students. Among some of the reasons why Black males do not complete college are lack of finances to support themselves and pay for school and poor social choices (Bean, 2005). Black males also receive poor academic preparation prior to college (Bean, 2005; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Palmer et al., 2009; Palmer & Young, 2009). Black males come into college faced with these immediate disadvantages for which they would require help. However, Black males are a population that is reluctant to seek help (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Marrs, Sigler, & Brammer, 2012; Wimer & Levant, 2011; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009; Palmer, 2015).

Disengagement

A heavily cited reason for underachievement for Black males is academic disengagement as well as disengagement outside of the classroom (Cuyjet, 1997; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004). Harper et al. (2004) conducted a quantitative study to better understand Black male engagement in comparison to Black female engagement. This study analyzed data from 1,167 Black undergraduate students across 12 HBCUs from the National Survey of Student Engagement. The findings concluded that Black male students were less engaged than Black female students in terms of their academics.

Building upon this knowledge, Kimbrough and Harper (2006) conducted a qualitative study across nine HBCUs analyzing Black male engagement at HBCUs through interviews with Student Government Association (SGA) presidents, residential assistants (RAs), and fraternity leaders. The results of the study found that Black men were highly disengaged, particularly out of the classroom. They valued sports and athletics and devalued engagement in campus life, had difficulty working together, lacked Black male role models who were engaged in campus life, and even lacked the GPA requirements to join fraternities that could serve as support systems for them (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006).

Disengagement and Depression

Black males' disengagement in the classroom may be indicative of depression, especially for first year students. A comprehensive study conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program at the University of California (2014) included data collected from 153, 015 first-time students across 227 4-year higher education institutions

in the U.S. and found associations between depression and disengagement. The results showed that many students who exhibited behaviors associated with disengagement were actually suffering from depression. Students who reported being “frequently” depressed were about twice as likely to show up late for class and to fall asleep in class.

Hysenbegasi, Hass, and Rowland (2005) found depression to be associated with decreased academic performance for undergraduate students. Depression also decreased university students’ abilities to absorb information and demonstrate learning (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005). This study also found that treatment resulted in improved academic performance (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005). This shows that depression is treatable. Unfortunately, since Black males are reluctant to seek help, their academic performance would not have the opportunity to be turned around from the benefits of treatment if they are depressed. While these studies were not exclusively limited to Black students and encompassed students of different ethnic backgrounds, the results in conjunction with studies on Black male students’ disengagement do point towards a possible link between disengagement and depression.

Avoidance of Help-seeking

One particular study has pointed to the impact of poor help-seeking on the academic progress of Black males at a HBCU, an area that has been understudied through research. Palmer, Davis, and Hilton (2009) conducted a qualitative study exploring the experiences of 11 Black male juniors and seniors at a public HBCU who participated in a remedial program and who graduated at their institution. The study concluded with several key findings. One finding was that Black male students experienced significant financial barriers while enrolled in college. They were met with a lack of financial

resources, requiring some to even work full-time while balancing the rigors of their course of study. They also experienced issues in their home and family life as well as in their communities, all of which act as barriers to their college performance.

Palmer et al. (2009) also noted that Black males at HBCUs were in need of help; however, they were reluctant to seek help from support services due to their sense of pride. Due to this pride, they were reluctant to ask for help when needed from faculty members and administrators at their institutions and to use their available support services. By the time they finally would ask for help, the problem would be beyond the institution's ability to assist them in the matter. This study, however, was limited in that it only took place at one HBCU.

More recently, Palmer (2015) expanded on this study by conducting research across multiple HBCUs to better understand the prevalence help-seeking behaviors of Black males. In this quantitative study, Palmer (2015) analyzed the data from HBCUs that had participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which is used to "assess students' engagement, learning, and development in four-year institutions" (Palmer, 2015, p. 37). The sample consisted of 1,779 students throughout 55 institutions from years 2009 through 2012. The findings of this study showed that many Black male students do interact at high levels with faculty and professional staff members at HBCUs; however, Black male students who are first generation college students in particular tend to interact less with faculty members and university professionals than those students who are not first generation. This is significant because employees of on campus counseling services are university professionals, so this population of students may be reluctant to reach out to them for help. Additionally, Palmer (2015) found that

greater class standing was associated with increased interaction with faculty members by students.

Palmer (2015) noted that while this study was able to support the findings of Palmer et al. (2009) in that it indicated a population of Black males at HBCUs who were reluctant to seek help through faculty and professional staff, this study was unable to establish whether poor help-seeking behaviors were due to unhealthy gender roles regarding their masculinity. Thus, Palmer (2015) mentioned as an implication of this study the need for additional research on help-seeking and whether it is affected by unhealthy gender role identity in Black males at HBCUs.

Research on Help-seeking Nonexclusive to HBCUs

As demonstrated through this overview of factors impacting the progress of Black males at HBCUS, these students are faced with challenges and stressors that make them an at risk population and threaten their retention. Thus, the topic of help-seeking by Black males at HBCUs faces a dire need of further exploration. Although the existing body of research on the help-seeking tendencies of Black males particularly at HBCUs is limited, there have been research studies nonexclusive to HBCUs that have identified some of the influences that have been shown to deter males, Blacks (as a general population), and Black males (not at HBCUs) from help-seeking. This following section will be organized into categories that will discuss these influences: Male Help-seeking and Stigma, Black College Students and Mental Health Stigma, Family Influence and Cultural Values, Self-concealment, Cultural Mistrust, and Spirituality and Religious Involvement.

Male Help-seeking and Stigma

Men have shown to be more likely than women to avoid seeking help for mental health related reasons (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Andrews, Issakidis, & Carter, 2001; Gonzalez, Alegria, & Prihoda, 2005; Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005). Consequently, the avoidance of help-seeking has even been linked to health problems, both physically and emotionally, for males (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; O'Neil, 2008; Wester & Vogel, 2012; Courtenay, 2001). Research has consistently indicated a relationship between male help-seeking and stigma (Pederson & Vogel, 2007; Hammer, Vogel, & Heimerdinger-Edwards, 2013; Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard, 2011). It has been shown that the greater the stigma that a male has towards help-seeking, the less likely he will be to seek help and to have healthy attitudes towards help-seeking (Vogel, Wade, & Ascheman, 2009).

The stigma that often prevents males from seeking help is directly related to several factors. Stigma may be related to unfavorable opinions held by the people within the male's direct environment (Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006). Stigma may be directly related to how a male will think of himself for seeking help (Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006). Consequently, if the people around a man have unfavorable attitudes towards seeking help, he will be more likely to view himself in a negative light should he in fact seek help (Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006). According to Mahalik (2003), stigma may also be directly related to a male's gender wherein it would be deemed socially unacceptable for a male to seek help on the basis that they are male, thus putting their masculinity into question for doing so. Males accept gender roles that society has created, and unfortunately these gender roles are not conducive to seeking help. These

roles are forced upon all men in the U.S. and include norms such as dominance, power, status, independence, self-sufficiency, strength, exerting control over one's emotions, ability to solve one's own problems, management of stress without help, control, and winning (O'Neil, 2008; Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Moller-Leimkuler, 2002; Wester & Vogel, 2012).

For men, going against these norms means they are exhibiting "nonmasculine" behavior (Wester & Vogel, 2012). Thus, they fear that they may appear weak or unmanly (Pederson & Vogel, 2007; Vogel et al., 2011). As a result of not adhering to these societal expectations set up for them, they may internalize their conflict and not only feel as though they are less masculine, but also feel as though other people feel they are less masculine (O'Neil, 1981). The contradiction of these norms can also result in a damaged sense of identity (Moller-Leimkuler, 2002).

Stigma may also be based upon perceptions of weakness held by males for seeking help (Pederson & Vogel, 2007; Vogel et al., 2011). Due to this stigma of weakness in particular, males may associate help-seeking with lack of strength, thus so that seeking help is an indication that they are not strong enough to do for themselves (O'Neil, 2008; Wester & Vogel, 2012). Therefore, the very act of asking for help would put a male's perceived masculinity into question.

Black College Students and Mental Health Stigma

Existing literature shows that Black college students in general tend to have negative attitudes towards help-seeking, especially help-seeking in the form of mental health services (Duncan & Johnson, 2007). With Black populations, there is a stigma

that is specific to mental health, and this mental health stigma is related to negative attitudes towards seeking help (Vogel, Wester, Wei, & Boysen, 2005).

Reasons behind Blacks' mental health stigma include lack of exposure and unfamiliarity with mental health resources (Wallace & Constantine, 2005). Another stigma is Blacks' fear that they will be hospitalized if they seek psychological help, a fear that is based on actual increased rates of misdiagnosis and involuntary hospitalization amongst Blacks (Whaley, 2001).

Family Influence and Cultural Values

Family members have a significant influence on reluctance to seek counseling services, especially when it comes to the help-seeking behaviors of Black male college students. In a study of 219 Black college students from a public and private university in an urban metropolitan area, it was shown that Black males were less likely to seek help if their family members had negative norms associated with help-seeking (Barksdale & Molock, 2009). On occasions in which they *do* ask for help, Blacks have a preference for receiving help from non-mental health related sources (Ayalon & Young, 2005). Blacks tend to hold family members as well as close friends and trusted community members as primary sources of assistance for problems or concerns rather than mental health professionals (Wallace & Constantine, 2005). Blacks are also more inclined to seek help from a clergy member (Ayalon & Young, 2005; Wallace & Constantine, 2005). It may be that Blacks do not necessarily have a problem with help-seeking, but rather that they have a tendency to seek different sources.

Self-concealment

Self-concealment is linked to help-seeking attitudes (Cramer, 1999; Wallace & Constantine, 2005). Self-concealment is “the tendency to withhold personal, sensitive information that is perceived as negative or upsetting” (Wallace & Constantine, 2005, p. 371). It leads one to hold any distressing event, issue, or personal information to oneself, rather than seek help in the form of sharing this information and talking about it to other people (Larson & Chastain, 1990). Cramer (1999) found self-concealment to have a negative impact on the likelihood of help-seeking. Wallace and Constantine (2005) also found there to be an inverse relationship between self-concealment and positive attitudes towards help-seeking for Black males.

Self-concealment makes talking to professionals about problems or concerns taboo in the Black culture. It is a by-product of adherence to Africentric cultural values (Townes, Chavez-Korell, & Cunningham, 2009; Wallace & Constantine, 2005). And in fact, adherence to cultural values and norms are linked to Black college males’ stigma toward mental health. In a study of 251 Black college students, Wallace and Constantine (2005) revealed that for both Black college males and females, increased adherence to Africentric cultural values was associated with increased self-concealment as well as increased stigma about seeking help through counseling.

Cultural Mistrust

When it comes to help-seeking, specifically for mental health and psychological related reasons, the bulk of the existing literature on Black Americans, including college students, focuses on perceived racism and cultural mistrust due to our nation’s long and tense history with racism and mistreatment of Blacks by Whites (Duncan, 2003; Prelow,

Mosher, & Bowman, 2006; Whaley, 2001). As a result of cultural mistrust, Blacks distrust White people, who are the majority, and distrust the culture and institutions they perceive as being affiliated with them (Terrell & Terrell, 1981; Townes et al., 2009). This is particularly present in educational settings (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). This cultural mistrust can become so pervasive that Blacks develop a *cultural paranoia* in which they have a suspicion and skepticism of any interactions with the majority culture (Whaley, 2001). The majority of counseling and therapy studies on cultural mistrust has been conducted with college students and suggests a negative relationship between cultural mistrust and attitudes held by Blacks towards mental health services (Whaley, 2001). Duncan (2003) attributes this mistrust as a possible explanation as to why Blacks underutilize help-seeking services, such as mental health centers. More specifically, cultural mistrust has been shown to have an impact on the help-seeking attitudes and behaviors of *Black males* (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001). It is also another reason why Black males do not seek counseling (Terrell & Terrell, 1981).

As a result of cultural mistrust, Blacks tend to prefer Black counselors (Townes et al., 2009; Whaley, 2001). Even particularly amongst college students, Duncan and Johnson (2007) found that Blacks with high African Self-consciousness and cultural/racial mistrust prefer to have a Black counselor. Therefore, if Black males perceive that help services such as counseling centers are staffed by White employees, they may be less likely to use such services because of cultural/racial mistrust (Duncan, 2003; Whaley, 2001). In fact, they may not even come if such facilities are staffed by White people (Townes et al., 2009).

Being that HBCUs are an environment in which Blacks are the majority population, it would seem as though cultural mistrust would not be such a driving force behind decreased help-seeking at HBCUs. One might presume there to be more positive attitudes towards help-seeking at HBCUs as well as less mistrust. However, in a study of 212 Black males comparing attitudes towards help-seeking through use of counseling services between male students at predominately White and predominately Black institutions in Texas, Williams and Justice (2010) found that there were no major differences in attitudes. Regardless of whether the Black males in the study attended HBCUs or PWIs, they still overwhelmingly held negative views towards counseling. These negative attitudes towards counseling were also found to be most prevalent amongst Black males who were underclassmen. Additionally, Black males at HBCUs, just as the males at PWIs, lacked insight into how to use coping skills for mental health issues.

The study concluded that Black males at both types of institutions had stigma towards seeking counseling, associating it with weakness, fear, their masculinity, and even mistrust. This shows that even at HBCUs, where Blacks are the majority ethnic group, Black males still hold mistrust that deters them from seeking help. The lack of differences in the attitudes of the Black males at the different institutions indicates that there is more of an explanation other than cultural mistrust to explain why Black males at HBCUs are not asking for help through such services. This gap in the research creates the need for additional studies of help-seeking tendencies at HBCUs, which this study addressed.

Spirituality and Religious Involvement

Another factor in the help-seeking tendencies of Black males is their spirituality. Research has shown that Blacks' spirituality and religious involvement plays a major role in their use of professional help services (Bierman, 2006; Wallace & Constantine, 2005). The findings of a study at East Carolina University of 192 college students (109 European Americans and 83 Black Americans) consisting of questionnaires in the form of Likert-type scales "were consistent with previous research suggesting that African Americans have higher levels of spiritual beliefs and religious participation than European Americans do" (Wallace and Constantine, 2005, 197). Comparably, in a national sample of Black Americans, it was found that "blacks who contacted clergy or other spiritual resources first were less likely to seek help from other professionals" (Wallace & Constantine, 2005, 379).

Tovar-Murray (2010) confirmed this preference specifically for Black male populations, finding that Black males had a preference for using religious resources when in need of support. Another study by Taylor, Chatters, and Levin (2004) highlighted the propensity for religious forms of coping used by Blacks, such as the frequent use of prayer and religious resources to deal with stressors. Drawing upon data from the National Survey of Black Americans, Taylor et al. (2004) found that prayer and asking for others to pray for them on their behalf was the preferred and most often used coping strategy by Blacks when faced with personal issues.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the relevant research. This literature review has shown that stigma and adherence to masculine gender norms are factors contributing to

males' tendencies to resist help-seeking. It has also shown that stigma, self-concealment, family and cultural values, and racial factors play major roles in the formation of help-seeking attitudes for Blacks (male and female included). In comparison to the bulk of the existing research, however, there has not been much research on help-seeking that has been exclusive to Black males at HBCUs. Palmer et al., (2009) found indications of poor help-seeking amongst Black males at an HBCU, thus bringing the topic of poor help-seeking to the forefront as well as masculine pride as challenges to the academic performance of Black males at an HBCU. Palmer (2015) expanded this study to understand how common poor help-seeking is for Black males at HBCUs and confirmed poor help-seeking as a barrier across several HBCUs. However, Palmer (2015) noted that the study could not conclude that help-seeking behaviors were due to gender role conflict and recommended a qualitative design to further investigate this topic.

This research study sought to answer this call by further investigating gender role norms and examining the influence social learning. While Palmer (2015) referenced masculinity as comprising learned and reinforced "socially constructed" behaviors, it did not examine social learning in detail. Further study was needed to determine if the reason for Black males' poor help-seeking is because they subscribe to socially constructed masculine behavior.

The findings of this research study are intended to build upon this existing knowledge. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in this study to collect and analyze the qualitative data gained from first year/first generation Black male undergraduate students at a HBCU in the southeastern United States. The results and the interpretation of the findings of this study are presented in Chapter 4, followed by the presentation of

the conclusion and discussion of the findings in Chapter 5. This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on the help-seeking attitudes and tendencies of Black male students at HBCUs and the resulting impacts on their mental health and collegiate success.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of help-seeking encountered by Black male undergraduate students and to understand how their experiences have shaped their perceptions of asking for help. The following section will comprise the methodology of the study for the achievement of this purpose. It will begin with a description of the research design, including an explanation of the choice of phenomenology in the approach of the study, followed by the research questions and description of the research site. This chapter will continue with the data collection procedures, including approval and consent procedures and descriptions of the sampling procedure, participant selection, and interviewing process. A description of the data analysis, validity and ethical issues of the study and the limitations of the study conclude the chapter.

Research Design

This research design was a study of human experience, which can only be approached through a qualitative design (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this study was to describe the help-seeking experiences of first year/first generation Black males and explain how these occurrences impacted their current views and likelihood to engage in the process of seeking help when needed. This required the *interpretive* approach of a qualitative research design, which seeks to understand how people have constructed meaning based on their experiences (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Phenomenology was the appropriate approach for this study because it captures and examines the lived experiences of participants who have encountered a shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002). This study aimed to examine the participants' experiences with asking for help, then to uncover the lens through which they viewed help-seeking based upon their prior experiences. The goal of phenomenology is to explore and construct the essence of shared experiences (Merriam & Associates, 2002). This study involved unpacking the life stories of these participants to construct themes depicting their attitudes and perceptions of help-seeking and to understand how the development of healthier attitudes towards help-seeking could be facilitated.

Phenomenology seeks to extract meanings and essences of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Its focus is on describing the experiences of the participants by portraying the nature of the occurrences through the participants' self-reflection and consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach depicts the essence of an experience through rich description that "leads to deeper layers of meaning" by means of an "interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). In this study, the data gained to comprise this rich description came through interviews guided by open-ended questions that unveiled first person accounts, from which the researcher interpreted what the experience meant for them (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

Research Question 1. What have first year/first generation Black male students been taught, whether through conversation or societal observation, about help-seeking?

Research Question 2. What experiences have first year/first generation Black male students had when in need of help and/or when asking for help?

Research Question 3. From what they have been taught and from their experiences, what perceptions of help-seeking have first year/first generation Black male students developed?

Setting

The research site was an HBCU located in a midsize city in the southeastern United States. The institution is public and offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs (NCES, 2015). Total enrollment is 9,928, comprising 8,128 undergraduate students and 1,800 graduate students (NCES, 2015). The undergraduate student body is 63% female and 37% male (NCES, 2015). This wide gap between female and male students is further indication of the importance of intervention for Black males to increase enrollment and retention. It operates with a semester calendar system and 88% of the undergraduate students at this institution are Black (NCES, 2015). The retention rate is 85% for students beginning in Fall 2014 and returning in Fall 2015, and it has a 6-year graduation rate of 35% for males and 41% for females (NCES, 2015). The institution is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (NCES, 2015). It also houses an on-campus counseling center that is one of only five HBCUs to be accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services, Inc. (IACS) Board of Accreditation (IACS, 2016).

Data Collection

This section will cover the method of the study, beginning with approval and consent procedures to conduct the study, and then detailing the population and sample procedures used for its purpose. It will also describe the sample, data collection procedures and treatment of this data.

Approval to Conduct the Study

Prior to the initiation of the study, full approval was attained by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board process as well as by the IRB process of the institution at which the data was collected (see Appendix F). This study adhered to the guidelines involving human subjects, and was compliant with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Code of Federal Regulations, 45 CFR § 46.102(2009). IRB approvals were obtained before any phase of research was initiated.

Consent to Participate

All participants were at least 18 years of age. At the beginning of the interview, students were read a letter of consent to participate in the study (see Appendix D). This letter provided a verbal overview of the study. This overview was recorded and included the purpose of the study as well as description of the study procedures, risks/discomforts, benefits, and confidentiality measures. The researcher asked them if they understood, had any questions, and if they still wanted to participate. If they still wanted to participate, the researcher proceeded with the interview.

Sampling Procedure

Determining and selecting the sample for this study was of the utmost importance because it is from the sample that the researcher is able to generalize about the population

(Creswell, 2009). A purposive sampling approach was used for this study. Purposive sampling ensures that the participants are *information-rich* and are best suited to provide data that will contribute to the study (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Through *purposeful selection* “particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2013).

The sample was comprised of Black undergraduate males at a southeastern HBCU who were first generation college students and in their first year of college. The rationale for selecting first generation college students was that they tend to lack immediate family members who have attended college and can give them direction. Thus, Black male students often face the stress of having to navigate their way through college being first generational college students and having to be role models in doing so (Williams & Justice, 2010). At HBCUs, first generation college students also tend to interact less with university professionals (Palmer, 2015). Therefore, these students may be reluctant to reach out to university staff members such as on-campus counselors, advisors, and other support staff who could help them when needed.

The rationale for selecting first year college students was that as underclassmen they are more prone to negative attitudes towards counseling (Williams & Justice, 2010). Additionally, students in their first year of college are in the process of transitioning to their new environment and lack full knowledge of their resources. It is critical to their success that they have recognition of the support services available to them and that they feel comfortable asking for help.

In comprising the sample size for this study, the researcher selected 10 participants for individual interviews. In determining the sample size for phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends selecting up to 10 participants for long-length interviews. More recently, Creswell (2013) recommends selecting three to 10 participants for a phenomenological study. The researcher, however, was willing to increase the sample size had the data gain not been sufficient and had the data from the interviews not been saturated since Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that saturation can typically be attained within 12 interviews, after which, new phenomena are unlikely to develop. However, this was not necessary.

Participant Selection

The researcher described the nature of this study to Residential Directors (RDs) and Residential Assistants (RAs) from the university's housing system to assist in selecting students who in their opinion were willing and insightful participants for the study. Residential Directors and Assistants have consistent and personal contact with students living in the dormitories, so their access to students provided the researcher with a network of potential participants who were insightful for this study.

The researcher requested of the RDs and RAs that they hold open sessions for residents where the researcher described the study and asked for volunteers to participate. The researcher described what was meant by help-seeking and what constituted as positive/negative help-seeking experiences. At these open sessions, the researcher provided a brief questionnaire form for students to complete, with check boxes to indicate type of family background, positive help-seeking experiences/negative help-seeking experiences, first generation/non first generation, and classification in college (see

Appendix E). This information was used to screen for appropriate participants. This form also included a section where students could state that they would be willing to participate so that they could be contacted to follow through with the study.

Participants were selected using this form information. After the open sessions, the researcher reviewed the information on the forms and separated the forms into those students who were willing to participate in the study and those who did not indicate that they would like to participate. Of those who were willing to participate, the researcher sorted them into categories that included positive association with help-seeking, negative association with help-seeking, and type of family background. The researcher then randomly selected five students with positive associations with help-seeking and five with negative associations and ensured that in both groups there was a mix of type of family background represented.

After the participants were selected, they were contacted by telephone to set up an interview time with them. If they were unable to be reached upon the first attempt, a voice message was left for them informing them of their selection and requesting for them to return the call at their earliest convenience in order to set up a time. Two days prior to the interview, the researcher called them by telephone to confirm the time. The day before the interview, the researcher called again by telephone to provide a reminder, telling them he was looking forward to speaking with them.

Student Interviews

Individual student interviews lasted 1.5 hours and took place in a sound proof room in the university's counseling center to protect confidentiality. A major threat to this study was the likelihood that students might not return to complete three interviews,

a strategy proposed by Seidman (2006). Therefore, for practicality purposes, the researcher conducted one long-length interview comprising three 30 minute segments rather than three separate/consecutive interviews.

Each interview was recorded to maintain accuracy for data analysis. First, however, the recording equipment was tested on the morning of the day of the interview as well as directly before the interview to make sure that it was functional and did not interrupt the interview process. During the interview, the researcher took notes. Each note began with the date, time, location, and pseudonym used to identify the participant. These notes included nonverbal behaviors, reactions, body language, and physical gestures observed of the participant. The researcher noted any changes in mood and attitude that were noticed as well as any key subjective responses to what was observed. These notes were brief so as to limit distraction, and the researcher wrote them by hand, and used abbreviations, symbols, and acronyms to enable quick notation. The researcher noted any key observations, statements, and responses that would need to be documented in further detail later. Following the interview the researcher expanded the notes to elaborate on the observations made and to provide more description.

The researcher began the interviewing process by sharing a personal story about his own experiences with help-seeking to help set the tone for the interview. Sharing a story first helped the participants begin to process their own stories and early experiences of help-seeking and also gave the participants a model for how to respond in their interviews. Seidman (2006) noted that sharing a story can be useful in that it allows participants to connect that story with their unique experiences, thus encouraging them to reconstruct their own experiences within their interview. However, this was done

sparingly and only as needed so as to not influence or distract from the participants' own responses, as Seidman precautions. When conducting the interviews, participants were asked to respond to each question honestly with as much supporting detail as they could provide, and each question was asked twice to ensure accuracy.

Each individual interview included three 30 minute segments. Each segment focused on addressing one of the three research questions. The first segment was structured on the participant's focused life history and what they learned about help-seeking prior to their enrollment in college. To address this research question, the researcher employed a list of guiding questions (see Appendix C) that were oriented towards what the participants learned about help-seeking prior to coming to college. During this segment, the participants provided information about who they were, as well as the background and context under which their understandings about help-seeking occurred. The second interview focused on the details of the participants' personal experiences when they have asked for help. To address this research question, the researcher employed a list of guiding questions (see Appendix C) that were oriented towards the participants' early experiences of asking for help. The participants reconstructed their experiences and explained what it was like for them to go through these experiences. This allowed them to retell the experience within the context that they detailed in the first segment. The third segment centered on reflecting on the meaning of the experience. Through this reflection, they expressed what connections they made, how they made sense of these experiences, and ultimately what these experiences have meant to them. To address this research question, the researcher employed a list of guiding questions (see Appendix C) that were oriented towards the perceptions of help-

seeking that the participants developed as a result of what they have been taught about it and what they have experienced.

In-depth interviewing was appropriate for this study because it is used to understand the behaviors of a population by putting into context the meaning they have shaped from their experiences (Seidman, 2006). In this study the researcher sought to understand the meanings that Black male have developed through their prior experiences with asking for help and how these meanings have shaped their current help-seeking behaviors and, more specifically, their willingness to use the counseling services of their institution.

Methods of Analysis

After each recorded interview, the researcher listened to the recordings multiple times and completed memos with my reflections from the interview. Writing field notes, also referred to as “memoing,” is an essential aspect of the data collection process (Miles & Huberman, 1984). After concluding each interview, the researcher wrote memos/field notes comprising observations, reactions and potential interpretations no later than the end of the evening of the day of the interview so that any details or reactions would not be forgotten. The researcher was sure to date the field notes, which helped to more easily and quickly see how they corresponded with the data (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The interview was then transcribed, noting reactions, pauses, and idiosyncrasies in these transcriptions within the margins of the text. To ensure accuracy of the transcriptions, the researcher replayed the recorded interviews, as the transcriptions were read through to make sure that the data corresponded. Upon transcribing the interview, the recordings were deleted to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

Following this process, the transcripts of the recorded interviews were coded for data analysis through the following: As the researcher re-read through the transcripts, like-information was marked off in the form of keywords, terms, and phrases within the margins, and patterns were highlighted that appeared throughout the interviews. The researcher used these codes to help form categories in relation to not only the data but in relation to the literature as well. Throughout the process, the researcher wrote memos about codes, categories, and their relationships. Fracturing strategies and connecting strategies were used to construct themes based upon relevance to the research design and the conceptual framework and to categorize recurring themes to form concepts. Matrixes were used to condense the data. These matrixes connected codes with their relevant categories/themes.

Validity Issues

This research posed multiple concerns related to validity. These concerns were addressed through validity checks to ensure clarity in the questions. Overall, the goal was to create as much confidence in the data as possible.

Firstly, the researcher was sure to transcribe all interviews to ensure that the collected data was accurate. Including full-length transcribed interviews and maintaining descriptive notes throughout the interview process ensured that there was *rich* data (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, maintaining journals and/or memos of reflections, ideas, procedural steps, and questions throughout each stage of the data collection process allowed the researcher to maintain an adequate audit trail (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Researcher/Interviewer

A major threat to the validity of this study was the researcher's subjectivity. The researcher's subjectivity came from his personal upbringing, which shaped his own views and feelings regarding help-seeking. Additionally, the researcher's experience as a counselor and things he has heard males say in the past about help-seeking and their reasons for not seeking help have shaped his subjectivity. For this study, it was critical that the researcher did not come into the interviews thinking that he already had the answers, for this could have led to him selectively hearing from the participants' responses only what would support his claims.

The researcher's subjectivity was not necessarily a bad thing because it helped in knowing what questions to ask to delve deeper into the topic. However, it was important that the researcher did not allow subjectivity to hinder him from validly interpreting the data that was collected and the themes that were constructed. Firstly, since there was only one researcher in this study and the data gained from the interviews was based upon the researcher's interpretation, there was risk that the researcher could construct themes that seemed to be consistent with the existing data when in reality they did not accurately connect. Secondly, there was risk that subjectivity could lead the researcher to interpret the collected data in a way that highlighted his underlying presumptions. This could have resulted in his being more responsive to cues from the interviewees that supported biases. Lastly, there was risk that the researcher could interpret a response in a way that it was not intended to mean by a participant, mistakenly perceiving it that way because of personal perceptions and biases.

In addition to completing research identity memos to remain mindful of biases, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal. Through these reflexive entries, the researcher made a note after every interview on how the interview may have been influenced. This helped with self-awareness so that the researcher would not continue any behaviors that could influence the interview.

The use of feedback from the researcher's professional peers and colleagues was also influential in this process of strengthening the validity of this study by limiting personal bias. Merriam and Associates (2002) identified peer review/examination as a method of strengthening validity. The researcher conducted peer reviews and discussions with colleagues and faculty members who had expertise within this field of research. After each interviewing session, the researcher debriefed with a colleague/professional within the field and discussed the findings to gain feedback regarding the presence of subjectivity.

Member Checks

To ensure accuracy in the data collection process and in the conclusions that were drawn from this data, respondent validation, also referred to as *member checks*, was used by clarifying with the participants during and after the interviewing process whether the data and conclusions that were drawn from their responses accurately captured their experiences and perspectives (Maxwell, 2013).

Triangulation

Merriam and Associates (2002) recommend having maximum variation within the sample selection. Maximum variation was achieved by selecting participants purposefully who could diversify the sample for the one-on-one interviews. Purposefully

selecting participants who had positive versus negative associations with help-seeking and participants who came from different family backgrounds helped to achieve maximum variation. Thus, selecting participants with different profiles accomplished triangulation. When similar themes began to be noticed across these different profiles, the researcher knew that the validity was strengthened and that the themes were consistent and accurate among the groups. This method helped protect against invariability in the responses, which was another validity threat.

Data was collected until saturation was reached to ensure that there was *adequate engagement in data collection* (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In order to gain as much data as possible, information was gathered until there reached a point where there was no further information to be attained. The researcher knew this because the data became repetitive and similarities were heard in the responses. This was important to gaining all relevant data related to the research questions. It was critical, however, that the researcher not only included data and interpretations that were consistent with the conceptual framework and personal theories, but that the researcher also included *discrepant evidence and negative cases*, which could lead to possible modifications of the conclusions (Maxwell, 2013).

It was pertinent that all questions asked were consistent and did not add any confusion for the participants. To ensure that the questions were clear, the researcher role played an interview with a colleague to ascertain whether their perception of what the researcher was asking was in fact what was being asked. The feedback sought through this role play was also used to generate better questions. A pilot interview was conducted with a student to strengthen the questions.

Ethical Issues

The researcher took appropriate measures to ensure the confidentiality of the participants of the study and to ensure that they were not put at risk by participation in the study. The researcher gained informed consent from all participants of the study, informing them of the purposes of this study and how this data would be used. Interviews took place in a confined space within the university's campus, to ensure that participants felt comfortable and that they had confidentiality throughout their interviews. All personal names and geographical locations were replaced with pseudonyms, so as to protect the participants' identities. The researcher also gained the review and approval of the Institutional Review Board at his institution and at the institution of study prior to engaging in the methodology of this study.

This chapter has presented the methodology, including the data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 will proceed with a summary of the results of the study, then followed by a discussion of the findings, including conclusions and recommendations, in Chapter 5.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand the help-seeking behaviors of first year/first generation Black male students at a HBCU. The first three chapters of this dissertation provided an introduction of the problem of Black male help-seeking in higher education, a review of the relevant research on Black males' help-seeking tendencies, and the methodology used to collect and analyze the data for this study. This chapter will provide a review of the research questions, present descriptions of the participants, and present the findings, which encompass the themes that were constructed to answer the research questions.

The interpretive approach of a qualitative methodology was used to collect data from semi-structured and open ended interviews. Ten participants were initially selected for interviews. However, one participant dropped out of the study. As a result, the interviews were conducted with a total of nine student participants, five with primarily positive associations with help-seeking and four with primarily negative associations with help-seeking. The data analysis process included listening to the digital recordings multiple times and completing reflection memos after the conclusion of each interview, transcribing the interviews, and coding the interviews by doing a line-by-line analysis.

These codes were used to develop categories that were placed in a matrix used to condense the data. Themes were then constructed as a result of studying these categories

in relation to the research design and conceptual framework. A brief biographical profile was completed for each participant based on information from their interview.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the interview data was analyzed to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1. What have first year/first generation Black male students been taught, whether through conversation or societal observation, about help-seeking?

Research Question 2. What experiences have first year/first generation Black male students had when in need of help and/or when asking for help?

Research Question 3. From what they have been taught and from their experiences, what perceptions of help-seeking have first year/first generation Black male students developed?

Data Analysis and Findings

Nine participants were interviewed for one session that comprised three separate segments. Each segment focused on addressing one of the three research questions. Participants were first year/first generation Black male students beginning their first semester during the summer 2016 semester at an HBCU. All of the participants were traditional students, and they were all 18 years of age. The criteria used to develop the biographical profiles included influential experiences shaping their help-seeking views, their primary association with help-seeking (positive vs. negative), and the type of family background in which they grew up. Pseudonyms were used for each participant to

protect their identity. Table 1 provides information about the pseudonym used, association with help-seeking, and family background for each of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Profile Table

Interview	Pseudonym	Association	Family Type
1	Thomas	Negative	Single Parent
2	Jay	Negative	Single Parent
3	Eric	Positive	Traditional
4	Ricky	Negative	Traditional
5	Terrell	Positive	Single Parent
6	Adrian	Positive	Blended
7	Leo	Positive	Traditional
8	Bobby	Negative	Blended
9	Liam	Positive	Single Parent

Brief Profiles of the Participants

Thomas 1. Thomas identifies as Black but also comes from a Jamaican descent. He was raised in a single parent family. His attitudes towards help-seeking are primarily negative. Thomas recalled a very early incident as a child at around the age of 12 that shaped his help-seeking attitudes up until his adulthood. He broke his glasses and needed a new pair, which would cost sixty dollars. His family struggled financially and although his mother was able to buy him new glasses it hurt him to have to ask his mother for help. He felt like a burden. During other times in which he needed help, he recalled feeling “useless, useless! Useless is the word. Useless!” Even at that young age, he showed

some conformity to masculine norms. He believed that as a boy, he was obligated to not put any additional stress on women. Thomas also recalled going through a traumatic event and having to endure it alone. These moments shaped his desire to be independent and not have to ask his parents for anything. To this very day, he still strives to not ask for help.

Jay 2. Jay is a college football player, a very large football player. He was raised in a single parent household. Jay recalled growing up with and still having very negative associations with help-seeking. “The hardest thing I ever had to do was ask for help.” He exudes machismo, seeing help-seeking as a threat to his masculinity. Jay recalled an incident during his childhood in which he asked his uncle for help in teaching him how to swim. The uncle agreed and threw him into the pool, refusing to teach him and insisting that he figure it out on his own. Jay did figure out how to swim that day, but he also figured that this meant in life he would have to rely on himself rather than look for anyone for help. That message has stuck with him until this very day. “I’m human. And like, I need help with some things. But I try to do everything. I try to make sure that I have everything set so I can do things on my own.”

Eric 3. Eric was raised in a traditional family. His father taught him to be independent, and his mother taught him to try to do for himself but to ask for help if needed. He observed that his mother was willing to ask for help and had positive attitudes about asking for help. His mother also had a strong willingness to help others, such as by adopting her sister’s children after they were taken away by social services. Her desire to make such sacrifices taught Eric to be compassionate and willing to help other people. Eric believes in the importance of working hard and finding ways to meet

his own needs. The way people commonly helped him was by helping him find a way to help himself, such as by giving him a job so that he could meet his needs on his own. While many of his friends lacked financially, he worked two jobs prior to coming to college. The better Eric did academically, the more he noticed that people were willing to invest in him and help him, even without him directly asking for it. He recalled help-seeking being normalized and noticing that the more help he received, the better his circumstances became. He also recalled having a strong support system, consisting of relatives and school administrators who were willing to help him as he was growing up. He noticed that when he asked for help, his peers followed suit and became more active in asking for help as well. This allowed him to overcome fears of being judged by his peers for asking for help. Eric was diagnosed with a learning disability and is registered with his university's disability accommodation's office, which has been very helpful and supportive to him. He attributes much of his success academically to the help he has received for his disability. The help he has received academically has further strengthened his positive help-seeking attitudes. He now associates help-seeking with happiness.

Ricky 4. Ricky grew up in a traditional family household and identified himself as having more of a negative association with help-seeking. He remembers his parents having very positive attitudes about help-seeking and encouraging him to ask for help. His brother was an additional father figure to him and was always supportive and willing to help him. Despite having a strong support system that fostered help-seeking, Ricky recalled an early hurtful experience of a teacher who was unwilling to help him in a math class and told him it was not her job. He remembers the experience vividly, and recalled

how it shaped his negative views of help-seeking. He remembers the confusion he felt as he thought, “What’s the point of not helping?” As he noticed peers receiving similar responses, he remembers giving up entirely on asking for help saying, “You can keep going on with your teaching. I’ll be fine.” Although Ricky has had more positive experiences than negative, he felt the negative experiences had a more significant impact on his attitudes. He still experiences anxiety when asking for help.

Terrell 5. Terrell was raised in a single parent household and identified as having more of a positive association with help-seeking than negative. He recalled an incident in the fifth grade in which his friend’s family helped him with a difficult school assignment. He remembered how relieved he felt and how it made him believe that all of his friends came from helpful families. It wasn’t much later, however, that there came a negative experience. One of his very shy friends needed help with a school project. Instinctively, he told the friend to ask his family since he believed that every family was helpful. However, the friend’s family was unable to help him, and it was incredibly surprising to Terrell. “I was shocked. Like, I was stuck. I didn’t know what to say. It was a crazy moment.” The experience made him realize that perhaps in life help would not be so easily attainable. It made him reluctant to ask for help. What made the shift in his attitudes ultimately was observing the fate of his parents. His parents taught him to ask for help but were opposed to asking for help themselves. As a result, they experienced negative outcomes in life. Terrell learned from his parents’ hardships and realized that to be successful he would have to not repeat the same mistakes and seek help when needed in life. As a young man, he feels his desire to be successful and reach his goals supersedes any discomfort he feels about asking for help.

Adrian 6. Adrian grew up in a blended family and identified as having positive associations with help-seeking, though this was not always the case. As a child, his mother was terminally ill and he was tasked with the responsibilities of managing the household and taking care of his younger sister. “I was the parent kind of because my mom, she had been married three times, then she had went through a divorce and she got really sick. So I had kind of became independent almost, taking care of mom, taking care of my sister.” Adrian recalled the days of being let down as a result of his Dad’s empty promises to send money and help the family. He remembered this really damaging his trust towards others and resulting in negative attitudes towards help-seeking. To add insult to injury, he was often called stupid and dumb and laughed at by other students when he would ask for help in school. Adrian later witnessed his mother’s death, and despite multiple attempts while on the phone with the ambulance, he was unable to revive her. What turned his attitudes around was receiving help from a neighbor who noticed they were struggling, and relying on his grandparents and religious faith to cope emotionally with his mother’s death. Noticing his circumstances improving and feeling more emotionally stable, it strengthened his trust and his associations became more positive. Adrian acknowledged that up until the present day, he’s received more positive responses than negative when he’s sought help. He admitted that he still struggles with pride, but ultimately he has become more willing to ask for help.

Leo 7. Leo grew up in a traditional family and reported having positive associations towards help-seeking since his early childhood. He remembered his parents having positive attitudes and encouraging him to seek help when needed. Leo experienced two association-defining traumatic events during his childhood in which his

life was dependent on someone helping him. One event was a life-threatening seizure and the other was a shooting that occurred while he was outside his house, from which his mother saved his life at the risk of being shot herself. The critical nature of these experiences taught him that it would be best to seek help when going through difficult experiences in life. Leo also learned from the suffering endured by peers attempting to deal with their issues on their own instead of getting help. Such was the case when his friend committed suicide after not getting help for emotional struggles. While Leo often witnessed his peers succumbing to fears of being judged and societal pressures to do it all themselves, he credits his confidence for allowing him to continue to seek help when needed regardless of how his peers might judge him.

Bobby 8. Bobby grew up in a blended family with his mother and stepfather and described his associations towards help-seeking as negative. Even till this day, Bobby experiences nervousness when asking for help out of fear of the reaction he will get from the person he is seeking the help from. He recalled a few experiences during his adolescence that shaped this nervousness. After misunderstanding a play during a football game, his coach criticized him harshly. “And then he was like, ‘You stupid, you slow!’ And like, I really got offended, and that’s when I think I really stopped asking people for help.” Bobby also recalled his mother being denied help from their church when his stepfather lost his job during the holidays. He remembered the church leaders not only denying her request, but telling her that she could do it herself. He recalled the feelings of abandonment they felt from the church. “They barely even helped us out. But they helped others. But they basically just closed the door.” Fortunately however, Bobby’s parents normalized help-seeking, affirming him and encouraging him to reach

out for support when needed. He remembered his parents telling him, “Any question is not a dumb question. Yea, I heard that a lot.” Although Bobby still dislikes asking for help, his desire to be successful overrides his dislike for help-seeking. He’s come to realize that everyone in life needs help.

Liam 9. Liam was raised by his single mother and described his help-seeking attitudes as positive. He recalled his mother being very self-sufficient and striving to resolve issues on her own. “She told me herself, ‘If I can do it myself, I’m not [going to] ask for help.’ Before she even said it, I already knew. Like, I could already see that she’s not [going to] ask for help if she doesn’t need it.” Though valuing her self-reliance, his mother encouraged him to ask for help if needed. Liam also noted that his uncle had very positive help-seeking attitudes and attributed this to his own positive attitudes. Throughout his childhood and adolescence, Liam recalled his peers having positive attitudes about asking for help, observed circumstances being ameliorated as a result of his mother seeking help, and reported generally good experiences when he’d asked for help. Despite having positive help-seeking attitudes, Liam’s preference is still to go about most matters independently without help if he is able to. Driven by his own ambition and desire to be successful, his fear of failure encourages him to ask for help if needed.

Research Question 1: What have first year/first generation Black male students been taught, whether through conversation or societal observation, about help-seeking?

The first research question addressed by this study was designed to understand the participants’ focused life history and what they learned about help-seeking prior to their enrollment in college. Transcripts of the interviews for the nine participants were

analyzed by identifying central ideas, quotations, and phrases that embodied the crux of the participants' responses to the interview questions and classifying them as themes. These themes were then compared across all of the participants who were interviewed. Themes that were found in most of the participants' responses are illustrated below with quotations from the participants' interviews that portray them.

Help-seeking Lessons Learned Prior to Enrollment

The nine participants were asked to describe what they learned about help-seeking prior to coming to college, including information about who they were, as well as the background and context under which their understandings about help-seeking occurred. These lessons consisted of beliefs they were taught directly by a parent, family member, or teacher. They also consisted of beliefs that came as a result of observations they made of their parents, family members, peers, or other influential figures in their lives. All of the participants reported an early memory of a conversation or observation that had an impact on what they learned about help-seeking.

Two themes were constructed from first year/first generation Black males as they described what they were taught about help-seeking. First, the participants were taught to be self-reliant (8/9 participants). All of these eight spoke of at some point in their early years prior to coming to college having learned to believe that it would be better for them to do things on their own rather than ask for help. This took place either by way of a conversation or their direct observation.

Secondly, the participants were taught masculine ideals that conflict with help-seeking. Their beliefs about help-seeking were influenced by masculine norms that they were directly taught or observed through their social environment (7/9 participants).

Table 2 provides quotations that represent examples of participants' responses that were linked to the themes that were constructed.

Table 2

Beliefs of First Year/First Generation Black Males from What They Were Taught about Help-seeking Prior to Coming to College

Theme	Quotes
Self-reliance	<p>“If I had to say, I probably got this independence from watching my parents because they’ve always done things on their own. And if they ever needed help, it was always a bad...it wasn’t easily attained. So I guess I got it from them.” (Thomas 1)</p> <p>“My mom said, ‘Ask for help if you need it, but you got to try to do stuff for you. Try to do stuff on your own because you can’t be dependent on anybody else. You can’t use nobody as a crutch, you know.’” (Jay 2)</p> <p>“Only thing I can say, people were like, ‘You want to be independent, especially as a young black male. You want to try to do things by yourself.’” (Eric 3)</p> <p>“She said that it’s ok to ask for help. Don’t be greedy about the situation. If you really need it, then ask. But if you can try to go get it for yourself then you should go</p>

get it for yourself.” (Eric 3)

“After that (witnessing a peer not being able to get help from his parents) it was more so of me just, you know, I want to learn on my own. I don’t want to ask nobody for help unless I have to. I wanna read, learn this on my own, learn everything on my own and then when it’s time for me to ask for help or it’s time for somebody to guide me with something I don’t know, then that’s the right time for me to ask. But until then if I can get it on my own, then I’ll learn on my own.” (Terrell 5)

“It (seeing his Dad not stand by his word to help the family) made me more like self-dependable, like kind of dependent on myself. I didn’t really wanna...I didn’t care too much for asking other people for anything to be honest. Kind of just felt like I was on my own. There’s a way to get it without help.” (Adrian 6)

Masculine Ideals

“I think he was just trying to get me to be a man and be dependent on myself as well. You can’t be dependent on anyone but yourself.” (Jay 2)

“You see the man as doing manly things and society makes it seem like when you’re a man you have to provide, provide, provide, provide, provide. So males

don't like to go out for help because they feel like they always got to be the one to give the help. They feel like they have to be the ones to always have the answers."

(Eric 3)

"Why are you acting like a girl? Why are you getting emotional? You're not supposed to be like this. I don't think I would get a positive reaction out of that at all.

Like, 'Oh, just man up' probably would be the best response I would find." (Ricky 4)

"So it's argued like, ok I don't want to ask her for help. I'm supposed to be stronger than a woman. And then on men, we're not supposed to be asking each other for help." (Ricky 4)

"I felt kind of weak. 'Cause I had learned like from a male in my church a man is supposed to be the head of the household. And I kind of consider myself a man and I didn't really want to ask anybody but I needed it. So it made me feel kind of weak, just a little bit." (Terrell 6)

"Well that male figure, kind of like males are supposed to be strong, kind of masculine, manly. They don't really need anything. We don't feel emotions. Just hard, hardcore to the heart. It's usually what you're taught." (Terrell 6)

“Males don’t really ask for help. But they’ll come and help.” (Bobby 8)

Being taught to be self-reliant did not necessarily mean that the participants were completely averse to seeking help or that they believed help-seeking was a bad thing entirely. In fact, seven of the participants stated that they were instructed to ask for help by their parents if they really needed it. Rather, these teachings on self-reliance meant that they were taught that going about their problems independently and not needing any help would be the better and more preferred alternative. They were taught that if it was absolutely needed, they should seek help. However, it would be more acceptable and favorable for them to do it themselves, without outside help.

For three of the participants, this self-reliance was modeled to them by their parents, who themselves preferred to be independent and do things on their own, rather than ask for help. One participant remembered how much his Dad did not want to ask for help even though his family was very caring and willing to assist. He stated, “And they’re loving about it, but I see how he feels about it and I’m like, ‘Ok, I understand you don’t really like asking for help. But since they’re your loving family, they’re willing to give it to you.’” A second participant recounted his parents’ attitudes towards help-seeking. “They didn’t ask for help at all really because they didn’t want help. They wanted to figure it out on their own.” Another reflected on his mother’s self-reliance after his father abandoned the family. “Well my father left when I was 9 so he ain’t teach me really nothing about help. My mom, she don’t really ask for help. She try to do it herself.”

When asked what he was taught about help-seeking, one participant responded quickly and without hesitation, “Your hands not join church.” This phrase was taught to him by his aunt and represented an analogy about help-seeking. This phrase meant that one’s own hands are free to pick up an instrument and join the church in praising God in worship. The church represents the problem and the hands represent the individual using their own resources (the instruments) to join in resolving the problem. The participant summarized what he ultimately learned from this analogy. “So do it yourself because your hands are free.”

What these males were taught about masculinity played a significant role in how they viewed help-seeking. The masculine ideals they were taught represented norms for how a man should behave and represent himself. These norms were characterized by strength, lack of emotion, and the expectation for males to be providers rather than needing others to provide help to them. Help-seeking was commonly understood as being in opposition to being strong. One participant stated, “I feel so weak when I’m asking for help. I don’t like... I just don’t like asking people for help. I just feel so weak and I feel like they’re [going to] take advantage of you as well because they know you needed help. I don’t like that at all.” This ideal of a man having to appear strong and fear of seeming weak was a recurring idea throughout the responses. In fact, the word “weak” was mentioned a total of 18 times throughout the nine interviews. To illustrate this theme, one participant had trouble coping with the loss of his mother but did not feel he could express those feelings or go to anyone for help because instead, he had to be strong for his sister. “So instead of me worrying about me and how it affects me, I kind

of just was there to comfort her...So I was more or less focusing my attention on her, being her stronghold, kind of holding it together.”

Another participant processed the idea of being told to “man up” and realized that he did not even fully understand it. It did not seem to make sense to him. He said, “It’s funny because ‘man’ing up’...what’s that supposed to mean? Like, putting more pride in yourself? Stuffing everything into a jar? Is that considered man’ing up?” However, even though he did not understand it, he felt that he still had to adhere to these learned expectations to “man up,” saying, “But it’s like you have to do what you have to do. Sometimes you just have to go on with it.”

Four of the participants grew up in families in which there were very limited financial resources. Their parents and families were unable to help them. Consequently, they came to believe that they would have to become more independent and self-reliant by meeting their own needs. The desire to be self-reliant was often so predominate, that one participant in particular believed he would be a burden for asking for help. After Thomas lost his glasses, he felt as though a burden to his mother for needing a new pair. “I put her in a bad situation because my shortcomings I guess.” Thomas even took it as a failure on his part and believed that as a male he should not be a stressor to the women in his family. “But you know, still I’m the only boy in the house so it’s kind of like you don’t want to put any extra stress on the women of the house or your mom or anything like that.”

Thus, it has been seen how these participants were taught seemingly incongruent messages about help-seeking. Many were instructed to ask for help when needed but were taught it would be better for them to be self-reliant and not need help. Then, they

were taught masculine norms that were in conflict with help-seeking. The next section will detail the themes uncovered in addressing the second research question.

Research Question 2. What experiences have first year/first generation Black male students had when in need of help and/or when asking for help?

The second research question addressed the details of the participants' personal experiences when they have needed help and asked for help. Each of the nine participants was asked a series of guiding questions that were oriented towards their early experiences of asking for help. The participants were encouraged to reconstruct these experiences. They were asked to give an account of these experiences and to explain what it was like for them to go through them.

Early Experiences of Help-seeking

One very significant and recurring theme was constructed from first year/first generation Black males as they described what happened when they were in need of help and when they sought help. This theme was negative peer evaluation. Every participant mentioned being negatively evaluated by their peers for seeking help or fearing being negatively evaluated by their peers when they were in need of help. This negative peer evaluation ultimately made them feel more reluctant to seek help. Table 3 provides quotations that represent examples of this theme.

Table 3

Experiences of First Year/First Generation Black Males When in Need of Help and/or When Asking for Help

Theme	Quotes
Negative Peer Evaluation	<p>“Honestly, I feel better than I did before cause asking for help back then it was like, ‘Oh dang, he gone go up to the teacher and he gone ask for help. He dumb.’ Or, ‘He can go ask his uncle for money. He’s poor.’ Or stuff like that. I didn’t want the image to be put on me.” (Eric 3)</p> <p>“Not necessarily any teachers but it’s a lot of peers that, like, ‘Oh you’re so dumb. Why are you asking questions?’” (Ricky 4)</p> <p>“Well, when I was younger, kind of like middle school age, had a little like...had a problem with raising my hand, asking questions in class cause I always felt like the question that I had might be dumb. Somebody might laugh at me.” (Adrian 6)</p> <p>“...it’s always gonna be that group of people that are just gonna disagree or put you down...” (Leo 7)</p> <p>“And then he was like, ‘You stupid. You slow.’ And like, I really got offended, and that’s when I think I really</p>

stopped asking people for help...” (Bobby 8)

“They try to be funny about, ‘Oh you need help? I thought you was smart. Look at you. You’re dumb.’”

(Bobby 8)

When participants mentioned facing negative evaluation by their peers, this evaluation manifested in various forms. Judgment was one of these forms. One participant recalled how he was judged as inferior for seeking help and said, “...back then they would judge; try to make it seem like they were better than me.” Another participant talked about how even until this day when he needs help the first thing that comes to mind is how he could avoid someone judging him. “Then I think quick, ‘Who can I go to that would help me? And who wouldn’t judge me?’”

Negative evaluations also came in the form of ridicule. Peers laughing at them for seeking help conveyed a message of disapproval and demeaning criticism. One participant made a powerful statement in describing how shameful, isolating and embarrassing it would feel when he would ask for help and his peers would ridicule him for it. He said, “Yea, everybody laughs and you’re the only person not laughing.”

Perhaps the most degrading form of peer evaluation came in the form of name-calling, particularly name-calling that questioned the intelligence of the participant due to their help-seeking. Six participants mentioned either being called dumb or stupid or feeling dumb or stupid as a result of their peers’ reaction to their help-seeking. The impact that this name-calling had on participants was further illustrated by the frequency in which these words were mentioned in the interviews. In fact, the words dumb or stupid were mentioned by participants a total of 18 times throughout the nine interviews.

These participants were very sensitive to the responses they received from their peers when they asked for help and how their peers would view them for needing help. This process of the participants seeking help and observing negative outcomes, which in turn influenced their behavior, was an example of social learning at work. In this case, the outcomes that were observed were the negative evaluations by their peers, which influenced their help-seeking behavior. The next section will detail the themes uncovered in addressing the third and final research question.

Research Question 3. From what they have been taught and from their experiences, what perceptions of help-seeking have first year/first generation Black male students developed?

The third research question addressed the participants' reflections on the meanings of their experiences. Each of the nine participants was asked a series of questions that were oriented towards the perceptions of help-seeking they developed as a result of what they were taught and what they experienced. The participants were encouraged to express what connections they made, how they made sense of these experiences, and ultimately what these experiences have meant to them.

Perceptions of Help-seeking

Two themes were constructed from first year/first generation Black males as they described their perceptions and the connections they made about help-seeking. The first theme was the connection participants made between their pride and help-seeking (7/9 participants). They perceived that help-seeking is an experience that is in conflict with their pride. As a result of their lived experiences, the participants became conscious of their pride and how it encourages their self-reliance. The second theme was the deep

sense of altruism the participants developed as a result of their experiences (6/9 participants). From their experiences, they came to a realization that it is better to help others than to seek help themselves. Table 4 provides quotations that represent examples of each of these two themes that were constructed from the responses.

Table 4

Perceptions of Help-seeking Developed by First Year/First Generation Black Males from What They Learned and Experienced

Theme	Quotes
Pride	<p>“You know, but I think it’s a more pride thing and stuff.” (Jay 2)</p> <p>“It’s very much a pride issue, very much a pride issue.” (Eric 3)</p> <p>“The pride kicks in here and there. It all depends on what I’m doing.” (Ricky 4)</p> <p>“Men and men, it’s like we have so much pride and we think we can do everything ourselves so we really don’t ask for help.” (Ricky 4)</p> <p>“Kind of like to depend on myself. Kind of like prideful. I have a lot of pride in my work. I just feel like I can do it myself.” (Adrian 6)</p> <p>“I have an uncle who’s like, ‘Whatever you need, I got</p>

you.’ I don’t go to him. And pride’s another issue and just asking for help, feeling like I needed help. I don’t like that, so I’m just like, ‘Nah, man. Nah, I don’t want you to get me nothing. I’m good.’” (Jay 2)

Altruism

“I prefer to give, give than to, you know, than to try to receive.” (Thomas 1)

“That’s the type of person I am. I want to help somebody. I want to help others.” (Jay 2)

“I rather help than really ask for help now.” (Eric 3)

“Oh, I love helping people. That’s something I always do.” (Ricky 4)

“Or I’m always helping somebody out. If somebody doesn’t know what something means, I’m always there to like help explain it or something. That’s just how I always am.” (Ricky 4)

“But basically I help a lot of people out and if they need help, I’ll help them because that’s what I do. Maybe that’s what I’m called for. That’s probably why I’m here on this earth. God probably put me here to help others.” (Bobby 8)

Regarding the first theme, the participants viewed help-seeking as a behavior that clashes with their pride. Their pride tells them to go about challenges themselves or at

least to believe that they can. To seek help would imply that they cannot. One participant came to the realization that in order to be successful in life, he has to put his pride aside. He said, "I'm [going to] have to swallow it but I'm gonna have to ask for help. I don't want to fail so I try to succeed in everything I do." The impact of pride in these participants' lives was very notable, especially in the sense that "pride" was mentioned a total of 18 times in participant responses. Five of the participants saw pride as a detriment or negative issue. When asked to elaborate more on what he thought of pride, one of these five participants responded, "Ugh, it's a deadly sin. And I believe it. Like, pride gets you." Two of the participants saw pride as a positive construct, something that encourages them to be self-reliant, which is what they were taught to be. They simply viewed pride as the fuel that drives their self-reliance and as something in which to take satisfaction. Such was illustrated by one of them stating, "That's why I pride doing the work by myself first." Regardless of whether they viewed pride as being positive or negative, they were cognizant of the role it plays in their help-seeking. This finding connects with the concept of pride listed in the conceptual framework and builds upon the research of Palmer, Davis, and Hilton (2009), which found that Black males hesitate to seek help due to their pride.

As a result of their experiences with help-seeking and what they learned growing up, the participants also perceived that it is better to help other people than to ask for help themselves. They developed a strong sense of compassion and willingness to help other people. For some, this altruism came from remembering times in their lives in which they needed help and how difficult it was for them to not have help. Such was the case with one participant who stated that it came from "...just seeing how it felt not being able

to get help. There's a lot of times where'd I'd be like, 'Man, like, I don't even got clothes right now. Like who's gonna help me, you know.'" Experiences like these increased his empathy towards those in need. He described how it made him more sympathetic and desiring to help others saying, "I understand how it feels, so, like, when I see people struggling or like need help with something, I'm like, 'Oh yea, man. Let me help you!'" Similarly, another participant processed his early classroom memories of seeing his peers struggling because the teacher was not helping them. He recalled, "But I always used to help them because the teacher didn't." Seeing his peers struggle without help made him mindful of how they were feeling and made him eager to help others.

Two other participants looked back on the altruistic behaviors of their parents and concluded that these learned experiences instilled within them how important it is to help other people. One said, "When somebody needed them, they (his parents) were identical on that part. They weren't mean. They helped people. They helped people out. That's where I get my part from." Altruism was modeled to him and it made him understand the importance of being kind and supportive to others. Likewise, the other participant thought back to his mother sacrificing to help care for her sister's children, who would have otherwise been permanently taken away by child services. "She made a sacrifice to stop making good money to take care of three kids." It made him come to the understanding that in life one must be willing to give up what they want in exchange for helping other people in need. Interestingly, this process of these participants observing their parents' altruistic behaviors and it then becoming a learned behavior for them was another example of social learning.

Summary

This chapter presented the five themes that were constructed to address the research questions of the study. These findings revealed that first year/first generation Black male students were taught to be self-reliant. They were taught masculine ideals that were incongruent with help-seeking. When they asked for help or needed help, a common theme was negative peer evaluation, as they were ridiculed, judged, and even called demeaning names. As a result of their learned and experienced prior to college, they perceived their own sense of pride and how it conflicts with help-seeking. In addition, they perceived the value of helping others and became very altruistic as adults. Chapter 5 presents a summary of this study and conclusions drawn from the research. A discussion of the findings includes recommendations for working with the population as well as recommendations for future study.

Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations based on the results of the research. The summary includes a review of the study's purpose, research design, data analysis, and limitations. Discussion of the findings includes conclusions of the research questions, recommendations for those working with the population, and recommendations for the future study of Black males in higher education.

Purpose of the Study

Lagging behind other races and their female counterparts, Black male students are faced with challenges that threaten their retention. As an at risk population, they are in great need of support. It is critical that they have healthy attitudes towards help-seeking to encourage them to use the support systems around them, such as tutoring, advising, counseling, mentoring, and support groups. Though HBCUs play an integral role in educating Black students, the help-seeking tendencies of Black males, particularly at HBCUs, have been underexplored.

The purpose of this study was to understand the help-seeking behaviors of first year/first generation Black male students prior to them coming to college and to understand how their experiences have shaped their perceptions about asking for help. I sought to understand how these experiences could be used to improve retention and

college completion by helping them to build healthier attitudes toward help-seeking. The study was guided by three research questions:

Research Question 1. What have first year/first generation Black male students been taught, whether through conversation or societal observation, about help-seeking?

Research Question 2. What experiences have first year/first generation Black male students had when in need of help and/or when asking for help?

Research Question 3. From what they have been taught and from their experiences, what perceptions of help-seeking have first year/first generation Black male students developed?

Research Design

A purposive sampling was used for this study, comprised of Black undergraduate males at a southeastern HBCU who were first generation college students and in their first year of college. At the start of the semester, the researcher attended open sessions held by Residential Directors and Residential Assistants for their residents. At these sessions, the researcher described the study and asked for volunteers to participate. To screen for appropriate participants, students were provided a brief questionnaire form to complete, with check boxes to indicate type of family background, positive help-seeking experiences/negative help-seeking experiences, first generation/non first generation, and classification in college. These forms were later sorted into categories that included positive association with help-seeking, negative association with help-seeking, and type of family background. The researcher then randomly selected five students with positive associations with help-seeking and five with negative associations, ensuring a mix of

type of family background. Selected participants were contacted by telephone to set up an interview time.

For each participant, the researcher conducted one long interview comprising three 30 minute segments, each addressing one of the three research questions. Interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. The first segment focused on the participant's focused life history and what they learned about help-seeking prior to their enrollment in college. The second interview focused on the details of the participants' personal experiences when they have asked for help. The third segment centered on reflecting on the meaning of the experiences.

Each interview was recorded to maintain accuracy. Notes were maintained consisting of the date, time, location, and pseudonym used to identify the participant. The researcher noted key observations, statements, and responses that would need to be documented in further detail later. Following the interview, the researcher expanded the notes, elaborating on the observations made and providing more description.

Data Analysis

Although 10 participants were initially selected for interviews, one participant dropped out of the study, resulting in a total of nine participants. Five of these participants had positive associations with help-seeking and four had negative associations with help-seeking. After each interview, the researcher listened to the recordings multiple times. By the evening of the conclusion of each interview, memos were completed, consisting of reflections, observations, reactions and potential interpretations. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and replayed as the transcriptions were read through to make sure that the data corresponded. Upon

transcribing the interviews, the recordings were deleted to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

The researcher coded the interviews by doing a line-by-line analysis. Throughout the process, the researcher wrote memos about codes, potential categories, and their relationships. These codes were then used to develop categories that were placed in a matrix used to condense the data. Themes were then constructed as a result of studying these categories in relation to the research design and conceptual framework.

Limitations of Study

The strength of this study was that the qualitative design allowed for the collection of more detailed feedback that might have otherwise been difficult to obtain through quantitative measures. One of the main weaknesses of the design of the study was the sample selection process. Purposive sampling was an appropriate means for this study because it ensured that the key informants selected were representative and that they were relevant to the study. However, with purposive sampling results can vary based on geographical locations. Additionally, having one participant drop out of the study limited the sample. Having a larger sample might have added more breadth to the study.

Researcher bias was another limitation of this study. Maxwell (2013) and Patton (2002) warn of the capability for researcher bias to impact how the data is interpreted in the interviewing process. The researcher is the primary instrument of the design as well as the data collector and the analyzer of the data (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The researcher's subjectivity can have a significant impact on the data gained through this study. As recommended by Maxwell (2013), a researcher identity memo (see Appendix

B) was completed to help gain awareness of the researcher's own biases and areas in which subjectivity could have been a limitation. This reflection prior to conducting any data gathering and interpreting helped limit the impact of the researcher's own feelings, assumptions and personal biases.

An additional limitation of this study was that the interviews were adapted from Seidman's three separate interview method to one long interview comprising all three components. The rapport may not have been as strong as if the participants had the familiarity with the researcher from meeting on multiple occasions. As a result, they could have had difficulty being as forthcoming with opening up about their experiences. However, the researcher's skill set as a professional counselor in building trust and rapport was very beneficial in reducing this limitation.

Results

The results yielded five themes that addressed the three research questions of the study. In addressing the first research question the nine participants were asked to describe what they learned about help-seeking prior to coming to college. These lessons consisted of beliefs they were taught directly by a parent, family member, or teacher. Two themes were constructed. The first theme was that first year/first generation Black males were taught to be self-reliant (8/9 participants). They were taught to value meeting challenges and their needs on their own. This learning took place either by way of a conversation or their direct observation. The second theme was that participants were taught masculine ideals that influenced their help-seeking (7/9 participants). These masculine ideals were incongruent with help-seeking and were either directly taught or observed through their social environment. In addressing the second research question,

the participants reconstructed their earlier experiences of needing help and seeking help. The resulting theme was that all nine of the participants either faced or feared negative evaluation by their peers, which made them feel more reluctant to seek help. The participants reported being ridiculed, judged, and even called names that undermined their intelligence. In addressing the third research question, participants reflected on the meanings of their experiences and the resulting connections they made. Two themes were constructed in addressing the third research question. The first theme was that participants became aware of the connection between their pride and help-seeking and realized that help-seeking is an experience that is in conflict with their pride (7/9 participants). The second theme was that the participants came to value altruism and developed a realization that it is better to help others than to seek help themselves (6/9 participants).

Discussion

Research Question 1. What have first year/first generation Black male students been taught, whether through conversation or societal observation, about help-seeking?

Black male students comprise a population that values independence and self-sufficiency. While some may be more inclined than others to ask for help when needed, it is important to note that their preference may be to resolve their issues on their own without seeking outside support. For example, participants in this study frequently mentioned a preference to deal with issues through self-directed methods of coping. Examples included playing sports, going to the gym, playing games, engaging in a fun activity or hobby, running, and prayer. Since they have a proclivity to rely upon themselves, it is critical that they be equipped with self-help tools that can help them face

personal, emotional, and especially academic challenges. For personal and emotional support, this could mean counselors educating Black male students on self-directed coping strategies such as relaxation and stress management skills, emotion regulation techniques, and solution-focused strategies, which are tools they can use on their own. For academic support, this could mean classroom instructors making Black male students aware of educational self-help tools such as websites, literature, and workshops that they could use to supplement their learning. Not being equipped with such tools could lead to lack of confidence in their abilities to be independent, as they have been taught to value their self-reliance. When working with this population, it is important to keep in mind that the type of help they require may likely involve strengthening their own abilities to tackle challenges themselves.

O'Neil (2008) defined Gender Role Conflict as “a psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others” (p. 362). This study showed that having neutral gender roles may be associated with more positive views of help-seeking for Black male students. Participants who subscribed more to masculine norms had greater reluctance to seeking help when needed. Participants who subscribed less to masculine norms and had a more equality-based perception of gender roles seemed to have less reluctance to seek help. This confirmed the influence of gender role conflict and masculine norms that was discussed in the conceptual framework of the study. Attention should be given to teaching healthier perceptions of masculinity and gender roles as it may improve Black males' associations with help-seeking and decrease any reluctance they may experience in seeking support when needed.

Research Question 2. What experiences have first year/first generation Black male students had when in need of help and/or when asking for help?

The participants in this study all recalled facing negative evaluation and critical responses from their peers when they asked for help in their past. An implication of this is that Black male students may be very sensitive to how their peers will perceive them and will want to avoid any help-seeking scenarios in which they might be judged as inferior or inadequate in any way. For this reason, programs, initiatives, and workshops put in place to help this population should be mindfully labeled. It is imperative that any such programs not be advertised in any way that would imply inadequacy. For example, one participant cringed when he remembered being welcomed to attend a program advertised to help students with low GPAs or low test scores in a subject area. He did not attend because he did not want to be perceived as dumb for having low grades. Instead, he suggested that programs should be advertised in a way that makes them open to all students who would like to benefit from the help. This would help to prevent students from feeling insecure about needing the help if they are indeed struggling in the area.

As a result of the negative evaluation Black males may have faced in the past when they have sought help, peers, administrators, counselors, and classroom instructors should always be mindful of their responses when Black males ask for help. Providing positive reinforcement for asking questions could be very advantageous when working with the population. Instructors can do this by simply being welcoming of questions. Especially in the classroom, responses such as “great question,” “I’m glad you asked that,” and “thanks for your question” can be very affirming when Black males have questions. Due to social learning, it’s important to note that the responses Black males

are given when they ask for help could determine not just whether they ask for help again themselves, but also whether other males, who are observing, ask for help.

Research Question 3. From what they have been taught and from their experiences, what perceptions of help-seeking have first year/first generation Black male students developed?

This study showed that when in need of help Black males may struggle with pride. However, the good news is that they are aware of their pride and how it can impact their help-seeking. Simply having a healthy dialogue for them to process their experiences with help-seeking and their pride could be beneficial and conducive to them building healthier help-seeking attitudes. Of all nine of the participants, Jay was definitely the most prideful and resistant to help-seeking. He had very negative experiences with help-seeking and mentioned pride more than any of the other participants. Interestingly, Jay's views and help-seeking behaviors changed after partaking in his interview. While I was doing campus outreach the semester after the interviews, Jay recognized me and pulled me aside to talk. He thanked me for the interview, telling me that it was "a really good interview" and that it made him realize how important it is that he ask for help more. This points toward how beneficial it could be for counselors, administrators, and/or housing staff to conduct sessions with incoming first year students to help them reflect on their experiences, the role of their pride, and discuss the advantages of help-seeking. Jay was not the only participant that this happened for. Immediately following his interview, Ricky mentioned to me that talking about and processing his experiences with help-seeking increased his willingness to ask for help in the future. It made Leo realize that although he still has some anxiety about

help-seeking, most of his experiences have actually been good rather than bad and that he should keep this in mind to encourage himself to continue to seek help when needed.

Social Learning

This study also showed the impact that social learning experiences can have on the help-seeking attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of Black male students. The negative effects of social learning manifested in several ways. Primarily, it was through the negative reactions the participants received from their peers when they tried to seek help. It was also through observing negative outcomes when their peers tried to ask for help, their societal observations of masculine behavior that ended up discouraging their help-seeking, and seeing their own parents not ask for help due to their pride and replicating the behavior. These social learning experiences discouraged help-seeking. However, just as social learning can have a negative effect on help-seeking, social learning can also be used to foster healthier help-seeking attitudes and behaviors.

Participants reported a phenomenon that they observed when someone asked for help: others, including themselves, also began to ask for help more. This happened for several participants. Eric developed a support system as a result of asking his friend for help for a personal matter. Both he and his friend began to turn to each other for help more. Terrell noticed that as a result of a small group of peers being bold enough to ask questions in class, more and more peers began to also ask questions, even the males. Liam noticed that more people asked for help in one of his math classes after they first noticed him asking for help. Even Jay discussed how as a result of him seeing other male peers ask for help in his classes in college, he became more willing to seek help and started asking more. Then, as he more frequently asked for help, he noticed that even

more of his male peers began to ask for help as well. This led to them even forming an academic support group and helping each other. Another participant, Leo, provided an additional example of how social learning could be used positively to inspire healthier help-seeking behaviors. When discussing the viability of counseling for emotional or psychological help, he talked about how he would be open to counseling if a peer used it and reported a positive outcome to him.

This phenomenon links to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory. Bandura described how "from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22). In all of these examples, a new behavior (help-seeking) was performed and observed by other Black males. In turn, these examples later served as guides for the other Black males to be more proactive in asking for help themselves. This shows that although early social learning experiences may have resulted in some negative emotional experiences for Black males, positive social learning can correct these experiences. Seeing others ask for help can normalize help-seeking behavior and make Black males realize that it is acceptable. It can help them to remove their façade of having everything figured, allowing them to feel more comfortable seeking the help they may need. If we create an atmosphere conducive to Black males asking and receiving help, it can increase their willingness to do so and use each other as a support system.

Altruism

Regardless of their associations or prior experiences with help-seeking, most of the participants in this study were very altruistic, compassionate, and valued helping others. We can help Black male students by not only normalizing help-seeking, but also

by shifting their attention to the possibility that their peers may be just as compassionate and willing to help others as they are. The reality is that their peers may have had similar experiences and consequently may be more willing to help them than they realize. Once help-seeking is normalized, these students have to be placed in settings where they can meet, build relationships, and network so that they can have more opportunities to help each other.

Conclusion

Coming into college and in need of help, Black males may struggle with pride. Many may view help-seeking as an experience that puts them at conflict with their pride, the very pride that encourages them to rely on only themselves. Therefore, HBCUs can foster healthier help-seeking attitudes in this population by addressing the unhealthiness and potential consequences of having too much pride, as it can stop one from seeking help when needed. Even at young ages, help-seeking for this population may have been negatively reinforced as a result of being judged or harshly criticized by their peers. Hence, help-seeking has to be normalized and positively reinforced to create healthier social learning experiences. Black males coming into college have to be taught that it is acceptable for them to need and ask for help. Additionally, they have to be taught healthier norms about masculinity to counter the unrealistic messages about masculinity that may have discouraged their help-seeking.

Research has already made it known that Black males at HBCUs struggle with pride (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). Research on men has also made it known that gender role conflict and masculine norms influence help-seeking (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Dancy, 2011; Harris et al., 2011). In these regards, this study supported what has

been known for Black males at HBCUs and what has been known for the general male population that could be applied to Black males at HBCUs. However, one very surprising aspect in this study was how altruistic these males became as a result of their help-seeking experiences. The review of the literature mentioned how prior research has linked the underachievement of Black males with their disengagement inside and outside of the classroom (Cuyjet, 1997; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004). The altruism this study has shown that Black males have developed as a result of their help-seeking experiences can be used very constructively in terms of their academic progress. Knowing their affinity for helping others, Black males should be educated about and encouraged to explore clubs, organizations, majors, and professions through which they can help others and utilize their compassion and altruism. Being involved in such clubs and organizations can help keep them engaged academically and active in campus life, while also providing them with more opportunity to build their professional networks. Pursuing such college majors can direct them towards a course of study that they feel passionate about, resulting in increased academic engagement. Their desire to help others can be a catalyst towards college completion and future careers.

Recommendations

This study explored the help-seeking experiences of first year/first generation Black male students. The following recommendations are provided to shed insight into how their experiences could be used to improve retention and college completion by helping them to build healthier attitudes toward help-seeking.

Although all the participants in this study recalled experiencing negative reactions by their peers when they have needed help or asked for help, not all of them had negative

associations with help-seeking. There were factors in their lives that accounted for these positive associations, and these factors provide direction as to actions that can be taken at HBCUs to help this population develop healthier attitudes towards asking for help.

First, in order to help this population develop healthier attitudes towards help-seeking, help-seeking must be normalized for first year/first generation Black males, preferable at the beginning of their college entrance. This can be accomplished by having early outreach programs that emphasize to students that everyone needs help at some point in their lives and teach students how to empathetically respond to their peers whenever someone needs help. The point that everyone needs help in life has to really be highlighted because for this population, the pressure to do everything on their own and not get any help can be very detrimental. For example, one participant in this study refused to take medicine for a sore throat he'd had for 2 weeks just because he wanted to fight it off by himself.

Black males are very much influenced by their peers' opinions and experiences. Therefore, it would be beneficial to sponsor outreach programs in which older student leaders at the university, such as peer mentors, resident assistants, and orientation leaders, provide their own personal insights on how help-seeking has allowed them to flourish in college. Hearing from other males about the importance of asking for help can play a significant role in normalizing it.

As part of normalizing help-seeking, first year/first generation Black males must be able to see and understand what can happen as a result of them struggling and not seeking help. Therefore, another useful strategy would be sharing stories of peers their age who suffered emotionally, academically, or even on a personal level as a result of not

seeking help when they needed it. This type of social learning is what encouraged Leo to ask for help. One of his peers struggled with depression and tried to deal with it alone. Unsuccessfully, the peer later committed suicide. It made Leo realize just how important it was for him to seek help when needed. Sharing such lessons can have the same impact on other students.

Another essential element to normalizing help-seeking would be to promote healthy masculinity. This is where mental health counselors could be incredibly beneficial. Outreach on healthy masculinity should be provided by counseling centers to address unrealistic and unhealthy masculine norms that discourage help-seeking.

Second, first year/first generation Black males must feel welcomed to ask for help should they need it. Due to their self-reliance, struggles with pride, and the negative experiences they have had with help-seeking in the past, Black male students may be unlikely to come into counseling centers when they are in need of help. The majority of the participants in this study were not certain that they would go to counseling if they were in need of help. Therefore, it is important that counselors not rely on this population to come into counseling centers for help, but rather that counselors go to them, provide outreach explaining the benefits of counseling, and invite them to use on-campus counseling centers if they are ever in need of help. It is important to keep in mind that this population feels more comfortable asking people for help when they have a relationship with the person they are seeking the help from. Making this early contact with students can establish familiarity, rapport, and trust with campus counseling staff, which could lead to them using such services in the future.

Professors, administrators, and staff members who have direct contact with students should strive to make early contact with students and invite them to ask for help if they should ever need it. Participants in this study who were invited to ask for help were more likely to seek help when they needed it. It fostered an early sense of trust and reduced their perceived risk of being rejected. This early contact with professors, administrators and support staff would be beneficial in that it would give Black males an opportunity to build relationships with the professionals at the university who can help them. This could happen in several ways at the beginning of Black males' college experience. One way involves classroom instructors. On the first day of class, professors/instructors should make it a point to emphasize they are available to provide help if students need it. It may seem obvious to instructors that their assistance would be available. However, because of Black males' experiences with help-seeking, they may not perceive that their instructors are truly interested in helping them. This invitation to provide help has to be directly stated.

Another recommendation for making early contact would be for university employees to join in helping students move into their residences when they arrive on campus for college. Having a first experience of university employees or student leaders, especially fellow Black males, being willing to help them would provide a very positive and powerful social learning experience for Black male students arriving onto campus. It could be influential in Black male students reaching out for help in the future when needed.

Third, first year/first generation Black males must have close pre-existing relationships with their peers so that they have people they feel comfortable asking for

help when it is needed. Black males are more comfortable asking others for help when they have developed a strong relationship or bond with that person. Allowing them to build these relationships at the beginning of their college experience can help them expand their peer support system for when they need help later. The creation of mentorship opportunities can be used to foster these supportive relationships. Upon stepping foot onto campus, each incoming male student should be provided an upperclassmen mentor. Mentorship can ensure that every incoming male student has a peer on campus who they already feel acquainted with should they need any help adjusting to campus life.

University housing administrators can play a key role in encouraging peer support systems by sponsoring socials and potlucks at the beginnings of the semester. One participant made mention, however, of how critical it is that food be provided at these socials in order to attract students. Sharing a meal together can foster a sense of togetherness and be a great bonding experience. Such opportunities can allow students to become acquainted with each other and network so that they can build relationships that they can later rely on when needed. One participant pointed out that many students at HBCUs may come from similar backgrounds. Being given an opportunity to network could lead to them realizing that they face similar struggles and obstacles. The bonds formed from sharing these commonalities could help them feel more comfortable asking each other for help when needed.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Black males have a strong sense of altruism and want to help their peers. Therefore, it would also be beneficial to help them set up peer-directed programs and/or self-help groups where they can help each other.

One participant even recommended having “connection groups” where Black males can connect with one another, help each other, and even mentor the younger Black male students.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study examined Black males’ lived experiences with help-seeking prior to coming to college. It shed light on common lessons they learned about help-seeking, common experiences they faced, and the perceptions they developed as a result. The following recommendations provide suggestions for how future research can expand upon the results of this study.

First, research in this area could be enhanced by broadening the sample. This study used a purposive sample. However, one of the limitations of using a purposive sample is that results can vary based upon geographic location. Future research should include a sample size encompassing participants across several HBCUs in different areas of the United States. Broadening the sample across geographic locations could identify whether cultural differences in various regions influence the findings. Additionally, this study used a sample of nine participants and was unable to determine the academic progression of the participants. A quantitative approach with a larger sample size could be used to measure the correlations between Black males’ academic progress and their pride and self-reliance. A study of this nature would be able to further examine the roles that pride and self-reliance play on Black males’ academic performance and retention. Secondly, future research should compare the results of this study to the results at a PWI to determine if the needs and experiences of Black males are similar at these two types of institutions.

Third, a key finding of this study was that Black males have developed altruistic qualities as a result of their prior experiences with help-seeking. This altruism could be used to help Black males collaborate with each other in order to reach common goals. Thus, an additional recommendation for future study would be for HBCUs to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of first year learning communities for Black males. First year learning communities could aid Black males in improving their support systems at HBCUs. Through participation, Black males could have the opportunities to make friends, develop accountability partners, network with their peers, and have convenient sources of help for their classes. Learning communities could also foster a strong sense of responsibility for Black males entering college.

The effectiveness of these learning communities should be evaluated through both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitatively, evaluation of these learning communities should measure the impact that participation had on help-seeking attitudes and behaviors, as well as the impact it played on building a support system. Quantitatively, evaluation of these learning communities should measure the impact that participation had on grades. It should also measure whether participants had higher graduation rates than those who did not participate.

Fourth, knowing that Black males may be coming into college with unfavorable help-seeking experiences, professional counselors and on-campus counseling centers can play integral roles in helping this population develop healthier help-seeking attitudes. Counseling-sponsored outreach programs, such as presentations, workshops, panel discussions, and psycho-educational activities on campus, could prove very useful in normalizing help-seeking and dispelling myths and unrealistic views regarding help-

seeking. Future study is needed to determine the effectiveness of such outreach programs in promoting healthier help-seeking attitudes and behaviors.

A common denominator amongst the majority of the participants in this study was that the masculine norms they were taught conflicted with help-seeking. Interventions are therefore needed to address Black males' perceptions of masculinity and their conformity norms that discourage help-seeking. A final recommendation is to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of healthy masculinity trainings. These trainings would help Black male students positively construct their masculinity, challenge attitudes that deter them from seeking help, and motivate them to engage in healthier help-seeking behaviors.

Counseling center staff as well as staff from different university departments could be trained as facilitators to provide healthy masculinity training to male students on campus. As an additional benefit, students who receive the training could also then be trained as facilitators to provide the training to other students. In this study, the effects of social learning led to several males adopting positive help-seeking behaviors after observing them from their peers. Therefore, students seeing their male peers facilitating these trainings could be a powerful experience for them in promoting healthy masculinity. Resultantly, they may even become more engaged if the training is facilitated by a peer. Evaluation of these trainings should not only include their effectiveness in reducing unhealthy masculine norms, but more specifically, their effectiveness in developing healthier help-seeking behaviors.

These recommendations for future study can be useful in guiding administrators and clinicians working with Black males *in college*. However, as Benjamin Franklin

once stated, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” The self-reliance and adherence to masculine norms that impacted the views of the participants in this study were formed during their childhood and adolescent experiences. The critical judgments and evaluations that participants faced for needing help took place during their middle and high school years. Hence, future research should also focus on early interventions, addressing the formation of Black males’ help-seeking attitudes and behaviors *before* they have come to college. Based upon the findings of this study, several recommendations were constructed to create enriching help-seeking experiences at the primary and secondary education levels so that Black males can be more likely to have positive associations with help-seeking by the time they attend college.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. Attention should be given to the effectiveness of sensitivity training provided in classrooms to make students more aware of responses that their peers may find to be offensive when they ask a question or seek help. This could increase students’ empathy, helping them to understand how difficult it can be to ask for help and how harmful it can be to feel criticized or judged for seeking help. This could also help students to better sense when they have responded to a peer in a way that may have hurt their feelings, made them feel inadequate, or otherwise discouraged them from asking for help again.
2. Research should explore the benefits of healthy masculinity training at earlier levels of education (elementary, middle, and high school). This could promote healthier gender role norms, reduce pride, and counter the negative messages

young Black males may have already received that could later inhibit their help-seeking.

3. Further research must be conducted on early prevention programs to challenge unhealthy beliefs about help-seeking and build self-esteem to prevent Black males from internalizing their need for help as indications of lacking intelligence or ability. Prevention programs could also be an opportunity for counselors to teach students that needing help and feeling vulnerable is not a sign of weakness.
4. Activities that will foster positive help-seeking associations for our young students have to be designed and implemented at the primary and secondary levels. For example, team building activities, through which students have to help each other in order to reach common goals, could be a way of cultivating positive associations with help-seeking.

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APPENDIX A:
Questions and Methods Matrix

Questions and Methods Matrix

Research Questions	Goals	Type of Methods	Analysis Methods	Potential Conclusions	Validity Threats	Methods to Decrease Threats
What have Black male undergraduate students been taught, whether through conversation or societal observation, about help-seeking?	To understand what the population has learned about help-seeking from family and peers.	Interview: Semi-Structured and open-ended; Learning-oriented guiding questions; Field notes; Case examples	Audio taping; Re-reading; Transcription; Coding to categorize and form themes; Memos about code/category relationships and potential interpretations; Matrix of codes with their relevant themes	Men should not ask for help; help-seeking is feminine; positive observations (help-seeking being encouraged); negative observations (help-seeking being discouraged)	Lack of clarity in interview questions; Invalid interpretation; Researcher bias; Lack of variability in responses; Errors in data	Interpretation/member checks; Follow up questions; Clarifying questions; Identity memos; Maximum variation/purposeful selection; Rereading Data saturation Triangulation
What experiences have Black male undergraduate students had when in need of help and/or when asking for help?	To understand how the population has asked for help in the past and the responses they received.	Interview: Semi-Structured and open-ended; Experience-oriented guiding questions; Field notes; Story-telling; Case Examples	Audio taping; Re-reading; Transcription; Coding to categorize and form themes; Memos about code/category relationships and potential interpretations; Matrix of codes with their relevant themes	Pride interfered with help-seeking; stigmatized; help was unavailable; ridiculed; shamed; embarrassed; help was received; support system was developed	Lack of clarity in interview questions; Invalid interpretation; Researcher bias; Lack of variability in responses; Errors in data	Interpretation/member checks; Follow up questions; Clarifying questions; Identity memos; Maximum variation/purposeful selection; Rereading; Data saturation Triangulation
From what they have been taught and from their experiences, what perceptions of help-seeking have Black male undergraduate students developed?	To understand their personal philosophy and resultant beliefs that they have constructed about help-seeking.	Interview: Semi-Structured and open-ended; Perception-oriented guiding questions; Field notes; Case Examples	Audio taping; Re-reading; Transcription; Coding to categorize and form themes; Memos about code/category relationships and potential interpretations; Matrix of codes with their relevant themes	Associations between masculinity and help-seeking; men must be able to solve problems themselves; help-seeking associated with inadequacy	Lack of clarity in interview questions; Invalid interpretation; Researcher bias; Lack of variability in responses; Errors in data	Interpretation/member checks; Follow up questions; Clarifying questions; Identity memos; Maximum variation/purposeful selection; Rereading; Data saturation Triangulation

APPENDIX B:
Researcher Identity Memo

Researcher Identity Memo

Relevant to my topic and setting, I have had much experience. My setting is a HBCU, and I am a graduate of a HBCU, so I am very familiar with the environment as well as the strengths and challenges within such institutions. The population being studied is Black male college students, and I have been a member of this population myself. My topic consists of an examination of how undergraduate Black males view help-seeking and how these views impact their willingness to ask for help and use help-seeking resources, such as counseling services. I have several assumptions regarding this topic. As a counselor, it is rare that Black males utilize the services of my office. From males I have talked to about this issue, the feedback I have received was that they view help-seeking as a sign of weakness and feel as though a “real man” should be able to handle all of his problems by himself. Their reluctance to ask for help seems to be masculinity-based. I know, however, that I have to be cautious so as to not assume that masculinity is the root of the issue. This assumption could act as a potential bias and skew how I direct the interviews, since I am the researcher.

My experience is an advantage in that it will guide me to create new research that will lead to improved help-seeking behaviors and greater utilization of help-seeking resources for this population. My assumptions that males view help-seeking and counseling as a sign of weakness will help me create focused questions that will help participants reflect upon the messages they have received about help-seeking in further investigation of this topic. If I end up receiving responses that indicate otherwise and that reflect positive views of help-seeking, the focus will then be on understanding how these positive views have developed and how they can be bolstered and encouraged in other

Black males. To ensure that my data is sufficient and not just in support of my own assumptions, I will have to be certain to collect a vast amount of data from several participants until I begin to receive data that is repetitive.

APPENDIX C:
Interview Guide

Interview Guide – First Year/First Generation Black Males and Help-Seeking

Research Topic: An Exploration of the Lived Experiences with Help-Seeking

Encountered by First Year/First Generation Black Males at a Southeastern HBCU

Date: _____ Time: _____

Interviewer: _____ Interviewee: _____

Location: _____

Thank you for your participation in this research study. To increase accuracy, I will record this interview with a digital recorder. When this study concludes, I will erase this recording to protect your confidentiality.

Interview Questions:

Learning-oriented Guiding Questions

1. What are some personal stories that convey the messages you have received about help-seeking?
2. What memories can you recall of your peers asking for help? What responses did they receive?
3. What did your parents teach you about asking for help?
4. How did your parents respond when they were in need of help? How did they go about seeking help?
5. What did you believe about help-seeking prior to your enrollment?

Experience-oriented Guiding Questions

6. Tell me about some of the hardest things you have ever done.
7. What made it so hard?
8. How did you handle getting help?

9. How did you feel about yourself when asking for help?
10. What do you think others thought of you?
11. What responses did you receive? Was help available?
12. How have you asked for help in the past and what responses did you receive?
13. How did these responses impact your willingness to ask for help again in the future?

Perception-oriented Guiding Questions

14. What words/phrases come to mind when you think of asking for help?
15. What emotions arise when you image yourself asking for help?
16. What do you think/feel about yourself when you know you need help?
17. How likely would you be to ask for help if needed? Who would you ask?
18. In what situations/contexts do you feel more/less comfortable asking for help?
19. If there is a difference, in what situations/for what reasons are you more/less comfortable asking for help than others?
20. What things do you currently need help with? How do you plan on going about it?
21. How do you feel about using counseling services for help?
22. How do you feel about asking for help for emotional/psychological reasons (i.e. stress; depression; termination of relationship; grief)?

APPENDIX D:
Consent Form

Title of Research: Perceptions of Help-Seeking by First Year/First Generation Black Males at a Southeastern HBCU
Researcher: Marquis Stewart

Consent Statement

You are being asked to participate in a qualitative research project entitled “*Perceptions of Help-seeking by First Year/First Generation Black Males at a Southeast HBCU*,” which is being conducted by Marquis J. Stewart, M.Ed., L.M.H.C., a staff member at Florida A&M University and doctoral student at Valdosta State University. This interview is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to partake in the interview, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the interview serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older. You may be contacted after the interview if I have any additional questions to ask relating to your experiences and feedback.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Marquis Stewart at (850) 599-3145 or marstewart@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

APPENDIX E:
Questionnaire Form

Questionnaire Form

My experiences with asking for help have been mostly:

___ Positive

___ Negative

Classification:

___ Freshmen

___ Sophomore

___ Junior

___ Senior

Are you a first generation college student?

___ Yes

___ No

Type of family background you were raised in:

___ Traditional

___ Blended

___ Single Parent

___ Other (Please specify): _____

If you are interested in being contacted about participating in this study, please provide your contact information below:

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

APPENDIX F:

Institutional Review Board Protocol Exemption Report



Marquis Stewart <marquis1.stewart@gmail.com>

IRB-03357-2016 Perceptions of Help Seeking by Undergraduate Black Males at a Florida HBCU

Tina M Wright <tmwright@valdosta.edu>

Thu, Jun 2, 2016 at 11:45 AM

To: Marquis J Stewart <marstewart@valdosta.edu>

Cc: Karla M Hull <khull@valdosta.edu>, James G Archibald <jgarchibald@valdosta.edu>

Marquis,

Please find attached your Protocol Exemption Report. Your IRB application was approved as "exempt" – meaning that your research will not require IRB oversight. If you have any questions, or decide to alter your approved IRB protocol, please contact this office.

Congratulations & Happy Researching!

Tina Wright

Research Compliance Specialist

Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration

Valdosta State University

(229) 253-2947

tmwright@valdosta.edu

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From: marquis1.stewart@gmail.com [mailto:marquis1.stewart@gmail.com] **On Behalf Of** Marquis Stewart

Sent: Thursday, June 02, 2016 11:04 AM

[Quoted text hidden]

[Quoted text hidden]

 **Stewart IRB-03357-2016 Exempt Approval.pdf**
297K



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 03357-2016

INVESTIGATOR: Marquis Stewart

PROJECT TITLE: Perceptions of Help Seeking by Undergraduate Black Males at a Florida HBCU

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption Category(ies) **2**. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal:

If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

Elizabeth W. Olphie *6/2/16*
Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator Date

*Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.*

Revised: 06.02.16