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College Persistence and Fictive Kinship of African American Male Alumni from a Historically Black University

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

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by

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MSW, University of Pittsburgh, 1981

BA, Lincoln University, PA 1979

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2021

Abstract

College persistence to degree completion by African American males remains a problem in higher education with little known about the supportive experiences of alumni from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the role fictive kin relationships played in the persistence and degree completion by African American male alumni from HBCUs. Brooks and Allen's concept of fictive kin relationships and Tinto's persistence theory in higher education were the framework to explore how African American male alumni from an HBCU characterized the role fictive kin relationships played in their college persistence to graduation. Data were collected through interviews with eight African American male alumni who considered others as family who were not related by blood or marriage. The data analysis included hand coding methods to understand the experiences in the context of the framework. Fictive kin relationships in college persistence for the sample were found to be supportive (as mentors, helpers, and motivators), involved in their lives when college students and later as professionals, became friends in many aspects of their lives, and took the place of family when and where needed. Positive social change in higher education institutions can result from noticing the importance of fictive kin in college persistence of African American males. Including outreach or programs for encouraging fictive kin relationships through college may improve African American males' persistence to graduation.

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Dedication

...but with God all things are possible

Matthew 19:26b

First, I want to give all glory, honor, and praise to God, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. I could not have taken this journey without You. Because of my career change and leap of faith; initially, I was intimidated when I began my studies. Through prayers, support and encouragement from family, church family, friends, and myself, I persevered.

To all the African American male alumni with fictive kin who persisted and graduated from an HBCU, your contribution to society is significant. God made you in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).* Continue to do great things for yourselves, your communities, and the world.

To the African American male alumni who gave your time to participate in my study, thank you for helping a sister out. The recruitment process posed a challenge for me, but you all came through. Although we experienced a global pandemic, the work continued, and you gentlemen came through for me. I stated "nothing interrupted" regarding my dissertation and COVID-19. Words cannot express how much I appreciate you. Continue to thrive, grow in your professions, and finish strong! You are priceless! Remember, you made it, you are worth it, and your lives matter!

God bless you all!

Acknowledgments

I can do all things through Christ which strenghteneth me.

Philippians 4:13

First, I want to thank God for giving me the strength and ability to persevere through my dissertation journey. I could have done it without you. At the beginning, I felt intimidated because of my career change, and I questioned if I could do it. With prayer, discipline, and time management I did it. I am so grateful and humbled by my experience.

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To my family, you are a blessing to me. A special thank you to my brother James and his son, my nephew Jamie. Thank you for supporting your sister and aunt through my studies and dissertation journey. Another special thank you to my youngest brother Edwin who supported me during my Residency in Atlanta, Ga. Family. I love you all!

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To my Baltimore, Md Church family, St. John's Apostolic Holiness Outreach Ministries, Inc, Overseer Yvonne Tate, Pastor Kim Morrell, and Brother Gerrod Williamson. Pastor Kim and brother Gerrod, thank you for contacting me in May 2016, the first day I began classes on my PhD journey with your prayers, love, and encouragement. You have continued the journey with me.

Finally, I want to thank Walden University for a blessed experience I had as a doctoral student. The academic resources, professors, staff, and residencies were instrumental in my growth and development as a student. My time as a student was valuable. As I embark on my new journey, I will keep the mission of positive social change as a part of my accomplishments now and moving forward.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

College persistence remains significant when considering the role of higher education in the success of African American male students (Johnson & McGowan, 2017). With fewer of these students staying in college to complete their education, it is important to explore persistence and its significance for this population. Receiving support has played a vital role in African American males' college persistence (Brooms et al., 2020). But a question has remained as to whether support of fictive kin relationships plays a part of that support role in the academic success of African American males. Research documenting the significance of institutional and social support for African American college students has been minimal (Harper, 2019).

Traditionally, family and kinship have been seen both as extended rather than immediate or biological relationships (Stewart, 2007). But families often include individuals who are not relatives but who provided social, emotional, and instrumental support (Pallock & Lamborn, 2006). Those who are not related by blood or legal ties but who are referred to as family are described as fictive kin (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Fictive kin relationships serve as networks of support and structure that ultimately help facilitate college admission and stimulate the aspiration to attend college (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Fictive kin relationships may have a role in the decision to attend and pay for college, which contributes to persistence (Tierney & Venegas, 2006).

University and community members might become fictive kin in a way that African Americans could incorporate and use the strengths of their own established kinship systems to help them persist through college (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Most

studies focus on academic success, social supports, and persistence in African American male college students (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Numerous studies exist on retention, African American males, and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), but the understanding of their experiences has been limited (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Further, limited research exists on fictive kin relationships in college, and no studies were found on African American male alumni from HBCUs. My study addressed the gap in the literature in regard to understanding the role fictive kin relationships played for African American male alumni who stayed in college and persisted through graduation. Chapter 1 includes the background for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, research question, a brief summary of the conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. The last sections of this chapter include the scope and delimitations, assumptions, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

Research has emphasized the low graduation rates of African American males. More than 61% of all males have enrolled in degree-granting higher education institutions in the United States, but only 12.7% were African American students, and they were scattered among a variety of institutions across the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Further, only 31% of African American males graduate college yearly (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Two-thirds of all African American males who enter higher education leave before completing their degrees, the highest attrition rate among all races and genders (Strayhorn, 2014). Regardless of college enrollment and plans to graduate from college with a degree, an average of 39%

of African American students graduate with a bachelor's degree after 6 years compared to 62% of Whites, 50% of Hispanics, and 69% of Asians/Pacific Islanders. Breaking the data down by gender, 34% of African American males completed college with a degree after 6 years (Anumba, 2015).

HBCUs were created to produce educational opportunities for African Americans when other higher education venues restricted their participation (Gasman & Palmer, 2008). There were 105 HBCUs in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), representing 3% of the nation's institutions of higher learning, yet they graduate almost 20% of African Americans earning bachelor's degrees in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). But there is little awareness of African American males' experiences at an HBCU (Farmer & Hope, 2015). For example, racism had been persistent, permanent, and omnipresent in U.S. society and consequently education (Milner, 2017). In U.S. schools, race and education are an important component as far as opportunities for learning (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Race and culture have continued to play a significant role in attempts to provide equal access to a quality education for African American males to successfully remain in and graduate from college. Some scholarly literature on African American males in higher education have also maintained a deficit narrative—one that assumes African American males lack the skills or drive to succeed in college (Bonner & Goings, 2017).

Students persisting in college through graduation remains a significant concern in higher education as institutions face major challenges because of declining student enrollment (Rizkallah & Seitz, 2017). Students also desire a successful college

experience (Rizkallah & Seitz, 2017). Having effective support systems in place, such as fictive kin relationships, may assist with college persistence. Some scholarly literature on African American males in higher education maintained a deficit narrative -- one that assumed African American males lacked the skills or drive to succeed in college (Bonner & Goings, 2017). Strayhorn (2014) conducted a quantitative study using the Black Male Student Success Questionnaire and the Grit Scale to examine the scholastic accomplishments of African American male college students at 4-year predominately White higher education institutions. Grit in the Strayhorn study referred to courage and stamina in a situation. Strayhorn noted findings indicated that grittier African American males earned higher grades in college as compared to their peers with similar educational aspirations. Strayhorn addressed studies on retention, African American males, and higher education. Strayhorn's research did not focus specifically on college persistence and fictive kin relationships of African American male alumni.

In this present study I addressed the gap in the literature due to limited information for African American males and social support for completing college. Learning about the experiences of African American male alumni, fictive kin relationships, and college persistence can provide an understanding of the perseverance of this population in higher education. Although there have been numerous studies on college retention of African American males and HBCUs (Bonner & Hilton, 2017; Gasman & Palmer, 2008), additional research is needed to understand the significance of college persistence related to the role fictive kin relationships played for African American male alumni from an HBCU. This study addressed this gap in knowledge.

Problem Statement

Persistence and retention in higher education focuses on students remaining in college until graduation (Borgen & Borgen, 2016). When students quit school for various reasons, persistence and retention become problematic (Marini et al., 2015). Low graduation rates of African American males from college have remained a concern (Rizkallah & Seitz, 2017). African American males encounter critical opposition to remain in school as well as graduate with a higher education degree (Brooms, 2018; Farmer & Hope, 2015). Retaining and graduating African American male students is an area that needs improvement (Brooms et al., 2015).

The success of African American males in college is due in part to the family involvement (Flowers, 2015). Families play a vital role as a continuing support network for African American males' navigation through the educational process (Flowers, 2015). Family relationships affect the college experience along with positive educational results for African American males (Brooks, 2015). Verbal motivation and encouragement from the family have been found as essential to the college success of African American males (Anumba, 2015).

Another potential support for African American males in the university may be fictive kin relationships—individuals who provide support that contribute to the academic persistence of African American males (Brooks & Allen, 2016). With fictive kin relationships, the view of family support becomes broader, beyond extended family when immediate family members are not present (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Research supports the idea that fictive kin relationships are an important cultural strength within the African

American community (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Social networks enhance and support African American males' persistence in college (Brooms & Davis, 2017). But little research has been done on how fictive kin relationships shape African American male college students' academic success (Brooks & Allen, 2016). This study addresses African American males' persistence in college by researching a gap in the research regarding African American male alumni's experiences at an HBCU with fictive kin relationships as they persisted through graduation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the role fictive kin relationships played in the persistence and degree completion by African American male alumni at a HBCU. The basic qualitative approach was used to understand participants in their natural setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This qualitative research provided in-depth information about the experiences of African American male alumni who persisted through graduation as they developed as students and the role that fictive kin relationships played while attending an HBCU.

Research Question

How do African American male alumni from an HBCU describe the role fictive kin relationships played in their college persistence to graduation?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study included fictive kin relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2016) and Tinto's (2017a) persistence theory in higher education. I describe them briefly here and in more depth in Chapter 2. Fictive kinship consists of

relationships that have no biological or legal basis but are born of ties of affection and commitment (Braithwaite et al., 2016). The concept of fictive kin relationships was used in this study as a basis for exploring African American males' support from individuals who are not immediate family members, but whom they considered as family (Nelson, 2014, 2020). Fictive kin relationships serve a purpose or meet a need for the parties in them (Allen et al., 2011). The question for this present study was what role they played in African American males' persistence to graduation at an HBCU.

Persistence theory in higher education (Tinto, 2017a) was used to explore persistence in higher education for African American male alumni. Tinto suggested that persistence in higher education involves student engagement in their collegiate experience and their ability to remain in college. Persistence occurs when student emphasis on their academic and social activities allows them to engage in their education and bond with others at the same time (Tinto, 1997). With everything ahead of them, students desire to persist even with the challenges they face during academic years (Tinto, 2017a). Further, there may be a connection between social involvement and enjoyment in college that leads to persistence (Strayhorn, 2012; see also Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) also noted that motivation was a key factor to persistence. Without motivation, persistence would not happen. I used this framework to explore the significance of social support in higher education experiences of African American male alumni participants. Combined, I used both fictive kin relationships and persistence theory in higher education to explore their possible roles in African American male alumni's college persistence to graduation. Persistence theory in higher education and

fictive kin relationships were expected to help understand the experiences of African American males' as they persisted in college through graduation at an HBCU.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a basic qualitative approach. The basic qualitative approach provides an understanding of individuals or groups in their natural setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used qualitative research to understand the human perspective in interviews with eight African American male HBCU graduates regarding their experience with fictive kin relationships and college persistence. I selected participants who graduated from an HBCU in various regions in United States between 1994–2015. This qualitative approach helped answer questions of how, where, when, who, and why with a perspective to build a theory or contradict an existing theory (Leung, 2015). My hope was to understand the components of real-life encounters of African American male alumni and their fictive kin relationships, as continued through college to graduation.

Definitions

College persistence: Defined as the enrollment in college each year until completion occurs (Browning et al., 2018)

Fictive kinship: Defined as relationships involving persons who were not biologically related but who described each other as relatives (Stewart, 2007).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): Defined as any historically Black college or university that was established and accredited before 1964 with the primary mission of educating Blacks (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014).

Assumptions

Assumptions are somewhat out of the researcher's control, but if assumptions disappear, a study became irrelevant (Simon, 2011). An assumption made in this study was that fictive kinships were understood as a phenomenon in the African American community. Another assumption was that African American male alumni who reported having fictive kinships understood them to be that prior to entering college. If such relationships were formed before these males considered entering college, fictive kin relationships were available to influence enrollment to graduation of African American male alumni. Another assumption was that African American male alumni attending an HBCU established additional fictive kinships through fraternities, athletics, or student organizations. Finally, an assumption was that through interviews, participants would be honest when answering questions. The assumptions were reasonable for this study as African American male alumni may be expected to have fictive kinships that assisted them with college persistence and completion.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations are characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of a study (Simon, 2011). From review of the literature, other cultures along with African American males have fictive kinships that are considered important and meaningful, but this study was delimited to only fictive kin relationships within the African American college alumni. Only the population of African American male alumni from different HBCUs were considered. This population was selected due to its accessibility to me and knowing something of the experience with college persistence, social engagement, fictive

kinships while attending a HBCU. A need to explore the experiences of college persistence through social engagement and fictive kinships of African American male alumni from an HBCU determined the scope of this study. There may be many other kinds of experiences of African American male alumni, but only fictive kinships were the focus of this study. Excluded from this study were the experiences of African American male alumni who did not attend an HBCU and other college students who may also have fictive kin relationships.

Limitations

The study was centered on college persistence and fictive kin relationships of African American male alumni from an HBCU. A limitation of the study was the challenge to recruit participants during a global pandemic. Although participants were recruited from various HBCUs through social media, only three HBCU geographical regions were represented. Other geographical regions could have been included, but that did not occur.

Another limitation was the ability to conduct face-to-face interviews. Zoom meetings occurred based on different geographical areas and time zones. All the participants had their cameras on doing the interview. But an observation of body language was limited because I could not view the participants' entire body. However, I was able to observe their facial expressions, tone of their voice, and emphasis to their responses. Despite the limitations, I conducted and completed my interviews.

Significance

This research addresses a gap in understanding the role fictive kin relationships played in the persistence and graduation of African American male alumni who attended an HBCU. Understanding how fictive kin relationships affect African American males' experiences in persisting and graduating from an HBCU may make it possible for colleges to consider additional services or programming to improve persistence with this population. This study also advances the knowledge in the discipline by providing information to assist with the college persistence of African American male to become alumni and incorporate fictive kin as a support network. Fictive kin are a support network of those who are non-biological relatives and can have a positive effect when it comes to education (Turner-Henderson & Leary, 2021). Including fictive kin as a part of the approach of persistence in higher education may bring about positive social change as a network of support and structure to assist institutions of higher education with retaining African American males who successfully graduated (Whitney, 2016).

To promote positive social change, the results of this current study may assist HBCUs in considering outreach activities or programs that encourage and support African American males to persist to graduation and become alumni. Such programs may consist of mentoring, peer groups, and faculty support. Providing a secure, nurturing environment may inspire African American male undergraduates to persist to graduation and become positive role models for younger men. African American male college graduates can contribute to being positive role models in society alongside the more popular culture models of athletes, actors, and musicians. Young African American boys

and men can look at African American male alumni and become motivated to be the best at whatever they chose to do with their lives. To promote the value of African American males, it is essential to provide support for their success with completing college and their professional lives.

Summary

There were numerous research studies on the topic of retention, African American males, and HBCUs (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Brooks & Allen, 2016; Gasman & Palmer, 2008). Although there were studies on fictive kinships in higher education, there were none found related to persistence and African American male alumni degree completion from HBCUs. The purpose of this study was to understand the role fictive kin relationships played in the persistence and completion of African American male alumni from an HBCU. A qualitative approach answered the research question. In Chapter 2, I provide the conceptual framework that gave direction to the study and the literature review that supported the need for this study, identifying the gaps in the literature and describing how this study filled at least one of the gaps of knowledge in the discipline.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Academic disparities exist between African American males and their gender and ethnic counterparts in higher education (Simmons, 2017). African American male collegians have had the lowest retention rates in higher education settings (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Universities understand the importance of students remaining in and graduating from college; however, college persistence remains a problem (Burke, 2019). Although the literature on African American males in higher education suggests that these men lack the skills and drive to succeed in college, many do experience success in higher education (Bonner & Goings, 2017). African American males receiving various forms of support plays an essential role in their college persistence (Brooms et al., 2020). Fictive kinships are important among African Americans (Allen et al., 2011; Braithwaite et al., 2016). The involvement of fictive kin can be a positive experience regarding education (Turner-Henderson & Leary, 2021). Fictive kin relationships in the university setting can be coping techniques contributing to the educational perseverance of African American students (Brooks & Allen, 2016).

Although there are various studies on retention and HBCUs, little was known about persistence and fictive kin relationships of African American male alumni who attended a HBCU. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the role fictive kin relationships played in the persistence and degree completion by African American male alumni at an HBCU. This study addressed the gap in the literature concerning fictive kin and African American male alumni. The major sections of the chapter consist of the literature search strategy, conceptual framework (fictive kin

relationships, persistence theory in higher education), the rationale for a conceptual framework, literature review related to key components, summary, and conclusion of the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy for this review consisted of several databases, including the Walden Library, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, SAGE Premier, Academic Search Complete, Education Database, Taylor and Francis Online, and Thoreau. I accessed Google Alerts through Google Scholar where I received emails on literature for my review. To locate literature, I used the following keywords and Boolean phrases: *college persistence*, *persistence*, *fictive kinship*, *African American males*, *higher education*, *African American male alumni*, *African American males in higher education*, *fictive kin relationships in higher education*, *retention, retention in higher education*, *retention at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, *retention at predominately White institutions, retention at community colleges,* and *social support and success in higher education*. The literature review search expanded from 2005 to 2021, covering college persistence and fictive kinships of African American males. Brooks and Allen's (2016) study of fictive kin relationships and African American males at an HBCU was significant to information on college persistence as it closely resembled my research study.

Conceptual Framework

The two theories were used in this study for the conceptual framework: fictive kin relationships (Brooks & Allen, 2016) and persistence theory in higher education (Tinto,

2017a). These theories provided a framework to address factors related to the college persistence of African American male alumni from an HBCU. This section describes the key components, assumptions, and the research context for each of the theories. This is followed by a rationale for combining the theories to create a framework for the research question**.**

Fictive Kin Relationships

Fictive kin relationships are relationships involving individuals who are not biologically related but those who are described as relatives (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Chatters et al., 1994; Stewart, 2007; Whitney, 2016). The role of fictive kin is essential in the lives of various people. Fictive kin have been vital relationships with persons outside of the family who are supportive (Poole, 2016; Voorpostel, 2013). Fictive kin support networks attest to the scope and broadness of supportive relationships and resources that are available to individuals (Taylor et al., 2013). The role of fictive kin has contributed to persistence among college students as well (Simmons & Martin, 2014). For college students who are away from home such as in another state from their place of residency, fictive kinships serve as an immediate support network.

Fictive kin relationships have been common in African Americans and other cultural groups for a long time (Nelson, 2014, 2020). For African Americans, fictive kinships are significant to individual growth and progress in life that includes higher education. Fictive kinships within a school and community relationship signify a long-standing tradition in the African American community (Curry & McIntosh, 2020). Natural supports such as family and fictive kin have contributed to the persistence of

African American students in college (Montgomery, 2009). Along with family, fictive kinships have been influential in African Americans attending college from admission to graduation (Allen et al., 2011; Farooq et al., 2020).

In regard to African American males, fictive kin relationships provide guidance, motivation, and support for them to attend and persist in college (Whitney, 2016). Fictive kin occur through role models inside and outside of the classroom (Alexakos et al., 2011). For African Americans in college, support is pertinent to persistence (Hotchkins et al., 2021). Fictive kin are incorporated into African American males' support system as an alternative to immediate family members when it comes to communicating challenges and relating to collegiate experiences (Brooks & Allen, 2016). African American males have described their fictive kin as faculty, staff, and peers who were like family; church and community relationships; and anyone not related by blood or law (Brooks & Allen, 2016). These fictive kin relationships are often sought by African American males primarily out of necessity and are often called on to be present in the absence of immediate family members.

Persistence Theory in Higher Education

Persistence consists of motivation and achievement of a goal despite challenges and obstacles in a situation (Tinto, 2017a). Institutions have addressed retention, but many wrestle with encouraging persistence of African American males beyond admission (Simmons, 2017). Tinto (2017a) noted that to continue in college, students must desire to persist to college completion. If students are going to persist in college, Tinto suggested some major elements of student incentives:

- Self-efficacy affects how students handle task, goals, and objections

- Sense of belonging where students felt they were a part of the college environment

- The curriculum in which the motivation of students allowed them to persist because they understood what they needed to learn.

Strong feelings of self-efficacy occur when students obtain their goals (Tinto, 2017a). Students with a high self-efficacy have persisted in college (Chemers et al., 2001). According to Tinto, students trusted themselves to know they could be successful in college. If students failed to do so, they would not persevere. Students also needed support during their college years to remain motivated to persist. The earlier students received support, the better they could get through the difficulties they encountered.

A sense of belonging pertains to students fitting in and feeling they were a part of the campus setting (Tinto, 2017a). Students must be involved and view themselves as significant to the campus community. By engaging in and including themselves in activities academically and socially, students feel that they belong. As a result of a sense of belonging, students are involved with other people or groups when challenges developed. Students then feel that they can get through difficult times because they belong to something where they had support.

Finally, the college curriculum is essential to the student's ability to learn and carry on (Tinto, 2017a). Students need to understand the learning material and see it as significant to their education and future endeavors (Tessema et al., 2012). Persistence occurs when students engaged in the curriculum that led to their motivation to learn

(Kahu et al., 2017). Students continue with their studies when they notice an increase in their knowledge and personal growth (Tinto, 2017a). Because persistence is an essential contribution to college completion, Tinto's persistence theory in higher education provided an understanding of the significance of African American male alumni's college persistence along with the support of fictive kin relationships.

Rationale for Conceptual Framework

HBCUs have been the institutions where African Americans have been supported (Gasman & Palmer, 2008). Fictive kinships and persistence theory in higher education provided a useful framework for understanding the role relationships outside of the family played in the college persistence of African American male alumni in HBCUs. Research on fictive kin relationships has shown positive results for African American families and college students in general (Brooks, 2011). Persistence theory in higher education provided an understanding of African American male alumni's engagement and growth with the support of fictive kin while attending an HBCU. These theories provided the lenses through which to understand African American male alumni persistence in higher education.

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Literature Review Related to Key Components

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In the review of the literature for this study, support for the research question is addressed and provided. The first key component for the study was the research on fictive kin relationships. The research in this section highlights the role fictive kinships play in the college persistence and success of African American male students. The literature indicated that fictive kinships are vital in the college persistence of African American

males, but alumni have not been addressed. In the current study, I added a focus on fictive kin relationships of African American male alumni navigating from admission to graduation.

The second key component in the literature review is research on college persistence and African American males. Although most racial groups have a notable expansion within educational institution presence and commencement exercises, engagement in such groups of African American males has declined (Farmer & Hope, 2015). I explored the significance of college persistence and retention in higher education among African American males. Because retention has been a concern for colleges and universities, retention rates has remained an issue, especially among African American males (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Researchers have reported that although college retention rates were increasing in general, the retention rate for African American males is lower than other races and genders (Harper, 2012). The current study thus focused on African American male alumni and their college persistence experience.

The third key component in this literature review is retention at HBCUs that highlight the significance of attending this institution of higher education for this population. Research has indicated the supportive HBCU environment and the effect on facilitating student success (Palmer et al., 2013). HBCUs have continued to play a positive role in the educational outcomes of African Americans (Palmer et al., 2013). The current study added to the literature to demonstrate the significance of HBCUs in the persistence of African American male alumni. The literature review provides a

background for this qualitative study of college persistence and fictive kin relationships of African American male alumni from an HBCU.

Fictive Kin Relationships

Kinships serve a purpose in the lives of individuals who seek support along with family. Fictive kinship connections are those unrelated by blood but are as equally significant as blood relationships (Stewart, 2007; Williams, 2014). Fictive kin relationships have been repeatedly interpreted by nationality, which became an ethnic characteristic based on close relationships (Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Historically, kinship was seen as an extension of immediate or biological relationships for African American people (Stewart, 2007). African American family relationships were centered on the adoption of fictive kin individuals who were not related to the family but played a role in assisting families with supporting their children (Brown, 2018). Within the African American family structure, the family system includes both biological relatives and fictive kin in many African American families, creating a source of comfort and support for the African American population (Stewart, 2007; Williams, 2014; Yosso, 2005). Consequently, fictive kin relationships were thought to play a more prominent role in the informal support networks of African Americans than non-Hispanic Whites, but ethnographic accounts of White families have also noted the importance of fictive kin, although in most cases the term fictive kin was not used to describe these supportive non-biological relationships (Taylor et al., 2013).

Although fictive kin are mainly viewed in the African American community, other ethnicities have experienced this relationship. In a meta-analysis approach, Nelson

(2014, 2020) surveyed 600 articles using the phrase *fictive kinship*, demonstrating the expression was predominant to African Americans. But Nelson also indicated that White and Mexican Americans had fictive kin for support, but the term *fictive kinship* was not used regarding Whites. Similarly, Allen et al. (2011) conducted in-depth interviews with 45 adults ages 55 and older of various races, genders, and classes to identify perspectives on the role of fictive kin. The findings showed most of the participants thought about their kin ties by expanding on the normal view of the nuclear family, which can apply to multiple ethnicities.

Another group to consider with fictive kin is college students. Fictive kin can encourage college students (Turner-Henderson & Leary, 2021). Fictive kinships supply additional support to individuals who need it because of societal norms or difficulties they experience. With fictive kin, students develop relationships with energetic groups within educational institutions, gain entry to universities, and connect with certain people at college (Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Fictive kinships provide support for students, their persistence, and their completion of college (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Scott & Deutsch, 2021; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007; Whitney, 2016).

Supportive relationships have also contributed to the success of African American males in college (Strayhorn, 2008). For example, engagement in religious activities and their fictive kin relationships have been used as a coping method that supported the college persistence of African American students (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Additionally, African American students' mentoring relationships with facility has had a positive effect

on them (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Therefore, fictive kin are a positive factor for African American youth (Scott & Deutsch, 2021).

Regardless of the importance of academic persistence, retention, and graduation rates in the field of education, limited information existed on cultural factors such as fictive kin relationships that affected college students' academic success, according to Brooks and Allen (2016). Strayhorn and Terrell's (2007) study found that college faculty had positive relationships with African American students. Those two studies addressed African American college students in general but did not include African American male alumni and their fictive kinships in particular.

There are studies that address fictive kin within other cultures (Taylor et al., 2013; Voorpostel, 2013; Wakamatsu, 2019). Taylor et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study that addressed the differences between African Americans, European Americans, and Caribbean Island ethnic groups related to fictive kinships. Their findings showed that fictive kinships were important to African Americans, but other cultures see the value of fictive kin as well. Taylor et al. suggested more studies on fictive kin to examine social networks within various cultures and to learn the significance of such support in addressing life goals. In an ethnological study, Wakamatsu (2019) observed *musahiplik*, the belief of fictive kinship among people in Turkey. Wakamatsu noted some fictive kinships were as strong as blood relationships. From these studies, it seems clear that other cultures included fictive kin relationships in their lives as a source of strength and support along with African American people. These studies did not, however, include African American male alumni.

Social and cultural factors were important for African American males in college, with positive outcomes occurring in collegiate settings when sources of support such as fictive kinships were present that provided encouragement and persistence to remain in and complete college (Whitmore, 2017). Nelson (2014, 2020) indicated that fictive kinships were natural within ethnic groups. In Nelson's noted studies, the lack of other support systems was determined to have been the driving force for African American males creating their own kinships. Turner-Henderson and Leary (2021) noted fictive kin as a vital support for African Americans. Fictive kin relationships include the social and behavioral bonds that institutions often look for to serve as support networks for African American males (Douglas, 2017). And, indeed, in Brooks and Allen's (2016) study, they noted that African American undergraduate students included fictive kin relationships as a part of a support network while attending college. Students have a need for support that fictive kin relationships can provide (Turner-Henderson & Leary, 2021). These studies support the idea that fictive kin are considered a valuable support network. However, their recommendations also include the suggestion that more is needed to be known about how African American male alumni's experiences with fictive fin relationships. In the next section of this review, I discuss research on African American males' persistence in college.

College Persistence and African American Males

College persistence of African American males has been a significant factor of concern in higher education (Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008) as institutions have viewed the success of African American males as important (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). College

persistence is an essential outcome for student success (Braxton, 2008): students, educators, and administrators in higher education have had the same goal—that students remain and successfully complete and graduate from college. Warren (2016) interviewed 18 young African American males and explored their perspectives about academic preparation to earn their degree from a 4-year college or university. Findings showed that African American males credited support such as community building, social networking, and personal affirmation as essential aspects of their academic preparation for success (Warren, 2016). Strayhorn (2021) interviewed 11 African American male college students who were in foster care. Findings indicated this population persisted through college with support. These studies give information about various forms of support that contribute to the persistence for African American males in college.

Other research on African American males explored their views of the importance of what it takes to persist through college. Anumba (2015) conducted a qualitative study that provided a deeper understanding of African American males' college persistence. The findings indicated African American males successfully navigated the college environment through a network of support systems such as family and peers. Similarly, Brooms et al. (2015) used semistructured interviews and a questionnaire to explore African American male college students' perceptions of their educational and personal experiences. The findings demonstrated the importance of engaging African American males in engagement opportunities and providing support to enhance their college experience. Brooms (2018) also used interview data from 40 African American male students at two institutions to explore their engagement and experience in Black male

initiative programs. The findings revealed that students' sociocultural resources contributed to their sense of being and persistence in college. These studies focused on college persistence of African American males and support systems.

College persistence continues to be essential for African American males. Hines et al. (2015) conducted interviews with two African American males from the southeastern part of the United States who persisted through and completed college intending to understand the assets and success factors that contributed to college completion of these men. Findings indicated that primary influences for both men consisted of parents, other family members, and other adults who built a sense of possibilities if they attended college. In their study, Kennedy and Wilson-Jones (2017) interviewed 15 African American male students studying social science regarding their experiences and feelings about their freshmen year in college. The findings had the potential to benefit university administrators as they addressed the freshmen's retention and completion. The Hines et al. and Kennedy and Wilson-Jones studies addressed how important college persistence is to African American males.

African American males see college persistence as a goal for them to achieve. Palmer et al. (2010) used interviews to explore the academic and social experiences of 11 African American males attending an HBCU. They emphasized that the effect an HBCU itself had on expediting the academic success and social experiences of African American males but did not address fictive kin relationships. Their findings showed that African American males persisted and succeeded at an HBCU with encouragement and support (Palmer et al., 2010). Continuing with that work, Palmer and Strayhorn (2008) conducted

a study that explored the results of 11 African American males who were not prepared for college but enrolled in an academic support program. Despite educational deficiencies, with the experiences in the support program these males persisted to graduation (Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008). In another study, Farmer and Hope (2015) conducted a quantitative study that had two variables: retention and completion of college for African American males. Findings showed that completion of college or university programs remained challenging among African American men. While numerous studies concerning college retention and African American men have been conducted, the availability of information on various components of how they themselves managed to persist in college through to graduate remains limited. This current study was designed to address that gap in the literature.

Retention at HBCUs

Retention has been described as students remaining in college, completing their studies, and graduating (Tight, 2020). African Americans choose to attend HBCUs for various reasons though their retention remains essential as at those institutions. The creation of HBCUs provided African Americans with academic opportunities, nurturance, and opportunity for the development of leadership when other higher education institutions limited their contributions (Gasman & Palmer, 2008). Gasman and Palmer indicated that an HBCU that offered caring, encouraging, and kindred domains was a practical alternative for undergraduates who found themselves inundated with bureaucratic and other institutional operations. Kumah-Abiwu (2021) also noted that

HBCUs provide a special role for educational opportunities African Americans. Statistics are available to support these findings.

Statistical support shows the importance of HBCUs in increased undergraduate enrollment and favorable outcomes (Bonner & Hilton, 2017). Specifically, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) 1,065,000 African American males were in college out of an entire U.S. population of 308.7 million persons (Mackun & Wilson, 2011). Bonner and Hilton noted despite the numbers, only 31% or 330,150 African American males graduate from college yearly (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Retention at HBCUs is essential to improving graduation outcomes.

All higher education institutions want to retain students for them to persist to graduation. When higher education institutions admit students from underrepresented populations, retention and completion remain a problem (Murphy et al., 2020). Tight (2013) reported research on student retention and engagement in higher education. Retention was more likely to occur if students engaged in college life both academically and socially. Tight (2013) previously noted that institutions were responsible for what students need to ensure engagement and retention. Kerby (2015) noted the importance of retention in educational institutions. College and universities that provide social change opportunities through students' experiences, socialization, and learning who they were in their new environment has led to greater retention (Kerby, 2015). Addressing students' academic and developmental needs will help colleges and universities improve student retention making graduation more likely. Retention at HBCUs requires support and

resources to ensure students remain until completion and graduation (Chenier, 2019). With the necessary support and resources, improved retention at HBCUs can occur.

There are studies that focus specifically on retention at HBCUs for African American males. Bonner and Hilton (2017) noted the standard graduation rates of 6 years for African American men from metropolitan HBCUs. This was different than those attending rural HBCUs because inner-city HBCUs provided undergraduates with additional facilities, personnel assistance, and ethnic relationships critical for the accomplishments of African American men (Gasman & Palmer, 2008). Commuter metropolitan universities provided occasions for African American men to go back to their home communities and still have a good college experience (Duderstadt, 2009). Gasman and Palmer (2008) also interviewed 11 African American males to understand their social experiences at an HBCU. The findings from the study were consistent with researchers who characterized HBCUs as supportive and nurturing. HBCUs reinforce the adage "it takes a village to raise a child."

Higher education institutions understand the importance of retention. Because of the decline in student enrollment, colleges and universities find retention to be more challenging (Rizkallah & Seitz, 2017). Rizkallah and Seitz found that higher education institutions struggle with improving retention as well as considering all the various needs of students to ensure retaining them through graduation and having them as alumni. Their study's findings indicated that administrators must address not only the learning needs and desires of students but a plan to strengthen student engagement to improve retention. In another study, Baker et al. (2018) surveyed 451-second semester freshman students

from two residential HBCUs evaluating if the relationships that occurred among students were leading or not leading to student perseverance at the institutions. The findings indicated the importance of the institutions providing specific and ample connections for students to make with each other. These studies addressed specific information on retention at HBCUs that I hope to extend in the current study.

Summary and Conclusions

The key components in this literature review included research regarding fictive kin, college persistence, and retention at HBCUs. Additional research on African American males' perceptions on the roles their fictive kin played in their persistence through graduation would add to the knowledge in the field of retention. The research for my study was designed to address this gap in understanding the college experiences of African American male alumni and their fictive kinships to gain a greater understanding of what these males required for academic persistence from a various HBCs in various regions.

In Chapter 2, I began with a review of the problem statement and purpose for this study on college persistence and fictive kinship of African American male alumni from an HBCU. My search for databases using key search terms was used to explore the literature for the topic. I discussed the conceptual framework for the study, which consists of two theories, fictive kin relationships (Brooks & Allen, 2016) and persistence in higher education (Tinto, 2017a) theory. From the current literature, Brooks and Allen (2016) noted that support such as that from fictive kin relationship motivated African American males to be successful emotionally, socially, and academically, when

transitioning into higher education that was experienced as sometimes challenging and frightening. Having someone close such as fictive kin relieved the stress and apprehension of this new experience. Encouragement and social supports were valuable and welcomed among African Americans males attending a college such as an HBCU. With social supports, African American males achieved success in higher education. The question remains as to whether fictive kin relationships had the same benefits for those African American males who persisted and completed college at an HBCU.

The status of African American males in higher education has become the motivation for research related to their collegiate experiences with factors focusing on retention and persistence (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Rizkallah and Seitz (2017) indicated researchers hypothesized that factors affecting students' satisfaction and motivation changed throughout their academic careers suggested that universities consider different motivational strategies to achieve increased retention and graduation rates. Also, Rizkallah and Seitz noted that administrators and faculty at numerous institutions exerted efforts to satisfy and motivate students, hoping to retain them.

Colleges and universities must incorporate protective factors that generate a resilient environment for student learning, adaptation, and persistence (Kerby, 2015). Student learning, adaption, and retention were critical to the favorable outcome of African American males succeeding in higher education. Having a resilient college environment and support that meets the need of all students, African American males will thrive and complete their education.

There were limited studies on college persistence and the role fictive kin relationships played for African American male alumni from an HBCU in different regions in the United States. The current study addressed this gap in the literature. In Chapter 3, I discuss the qualitative approach to this study as I explored the experiences of the college persistence of African American male alumni who attended an HBCU and their fictive kin relationship. The conceptual frameworks of fictive kin relationships and persistence theory in higher education were chosen to help understand the connection between the college persistence and fictive kinship. Hearing the voices of African American male alumni provided a clear comprehension of their higher education experience and their persistence to completion.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the role fictive kin relationships played in the persistence and degree completion by African American male alumni from an HBCU. Qualitative research provided in-depth information about the real-life experiences of African American male alumni, college persistence, and fictive kin relationships while attending a HBCU (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design and rationale; the role of the researcher; the methodology, which includes the participant selection, data collection, and data analysis; issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question was "How do African American male alumni from a HBCU describe the role fictive kin relationships played in their college persistence to graduation?" Thus, I chose a basic qualitative inquiry approach to conduct my study. Phenomenology was not considered for this study as it addresses the internal thinking process of people (Percy et al., 2015), involving an investigation of a person's understanding of an occurrence (Burkholder et al., 2016). I was more interested in a participants' reflection of their individual experiences than their deeper understanding of a phenomena. Additionally, narrative studies are used to learn about an individual's experience as it relates to a specific life event or sequence of events (Burkholder et al., 2016). Narrative inquiries consist of exploring a person's background from their stories (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Though investigating a narrative may be essential for some research questions, this was not a suitable design for my research question. Further, a

case study consists of information about specific circumstances (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Although this method could have been another way to conduct my study, I chose not to

use this method because I was only interested in the participants sharing their experiences

and not the actions, structures, or policies of the HBCU they attended. Although

phenomenology, narrative, focus groups, and case studies are effective research

methodologies (Patton, 2015), the base qualitative inquiry brought out the genuine

experiences of African American male alumni from an HBCU, college persistence, and

their fictive kin.

The basic qualitative design gave the participants the opportunity to individually

share their experiences and allow their voices to be heard in an organized manner. The

basic qualitative design included interview questions that guided the participants through

the interview process. The experiences of African American male alumni were expected

to serve as evidence of the role fictive kin relationships played in encouraging African

American males to persist and complete college. In-depth interviews offered detailed

information that comes from real-life experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Focus groups

are people gathered together by the researcher to share a common interest (Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). I considered focus groups as a method that would give all participants of

the study a chance to share experiences together. However, I decided not to use a focus

group as potential participants were not conveniently located in the same area and

coordination of a group online could be problematic.

Role of the Researcher

As an African American woman who is an alumnus from a HBCU, I found it rewarding to have an opportunity to explore what persistence to graduation looks like from the perspective of African American male alumni. I have been working as a substitute teacher in the public school system. As an educator, I had an interest in seeing African American males become successful by completing elementary and secondary schools and going on to attend, persist, and graduate from college. I also had an interest in learning more about the support networks besides family that were available to this population.

My role as a researcher was to interview participants, collect data, and analyze the data. I had experience with interviewing from my previous profession. The relationship I had with the participants was only that of being an alumnus who persisted and graduated from an HBCU with the support of fictive kinships. I did not have personal or professional connections with any of the participants. Because I did not know them on a personal or professional level, that eliminated some potential for bias. Because of my close connection with my HBCU, I managed any biases by listening and having an open mind to hear the participants' personal experiences. I realized everyone's story was not the same, and individual experiences bring uniqueness to storytelling. At the heart of in-depth interviews was the concern to learn about the experience of people's lives (Seidman, 2012).

My previous profession as a social worker equipped me with the methods to direct interviews. In the advanced research course, I interviewed practice participants to

prepare for the actual interview. I also created a reflective journal. Reflexivity gives the perspective of the researcher's personal experience from conducting the interviews (Mruck & Breuer, 2003). A reflective journal allowed me to review the data, the conclusions, and the indications from the research findings (Bourke, 2014). Having a reflective journal made the study noticeable to the researcher (Ortlipp, 2008). In doing so, I referred to my interviews, considered the perspective of the participants, and how the information affected me as the researcher.

Methodology

In this section, I identify and discuss the methodology I used for my study. My participant population was African American male alumni who persisted and graduated from an HBCU with the support of fictive kin relationships. The sampling strategy I used was obtaining potential alumni contact information from the HBCU's database. Other strategies were considered if the database did not produce enough potential participants. Since the HBCU's database did not produce potential participants, my strategy included recruiting participants through social media.

Participant Selection Logic

The study consisted of the first eight participants who responded that they met the criteria and agreed to participate in the interview. Meeting the criteria was determined by the potential participants' responses to the invitation. They were asked in my email invitation if they identified any fictive kin they interacted with and who supported them while attending the HBCU, and they needed to have graduated between 1994–2015.

Establishing data saturation and the sample size occurred when sufficient information to copy the study, new information had been gathered, and no additional code was needed (Guest et al., 2006; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012). Saturation occurred with the sample size once all the required information for the study had been met. With a sample size of eight participants, saturation developed at this level (Bernard, 2012). The number of participants provided the same details, which meant no additional data were collected.

Instrumentation

For my study, I developed an interview protocol (Appendix) in consultation with my committee and as a result of my learning from the advanced qualitative research course where I field-tested the interview questions. Burkholder et al. (2016) noted having a clear protocol was significant when interviewing participants for a research study. The interview protocol was comprised of questions asking pertinent information related to the research question, conceptual framework, and literature review. The conceptual framework reflected the research questions by addressing racial identity and the voice of African American male alumni. I began the interview by introducing myself and my role as the researcher. By doing so, my goal was to establish a rapport with the participants to prepare them for the interview questions. There were 10 interview questions with additional probes that focused on fictive kinship and college persistence, African American male alumni, and fictive kin relationships. The questions were open-ended which allowed the participants to give detailed information and share their experiences

(Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants' answers to questions captured their experiences with college persistence and fictive kin relationships while attending an HBCU.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once I applied for and received Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (#02-04-21-0256066), through social media, I invited African American male alumni to participate in this study who persisted to graduation between 1994–2015 and who indicated that they had fictive kinships. I confirmed that the African American male alumni met the criteria by having them respond that fictive kin were active in their college persistence to completion from the HBCU. I connected with an HBCU and obtained permission for them to send my invitation via email for participation in this study through the university's database of African American male alumni. I posted the same invitation to potential participants through the college's alumni Facebook page, HBCU alumni, fraternity Facebook pages, snowball recruiting. The participants were contacted through email with an explanation of the research study.

I conducted the interviews with eight participants within a month. Once a potential participant responded to the invitation with interest in the study, I emailed them the informed consent, asked them to reply by email "I consent" along with a suggested day and time to schedule the Zoom conference interview. The interviews were scheduled depending on the availability of the participants. My plan was to schedule 45 to 60-minute interviews to allow enough time to address the interview questions. The data was recorded by me using the Zoom functions and then transcribed by myself. At the conclusion of each interview, I informed the participant that the next step of the process

was sending them their transcript to review for accuracy and any additional information they would like to share. In appreciation of their willingness and availability to participate in my study, I forwarded them an electronic $20 gift card.

Data Analysis Plan

My data analysis plan involved a step-by-step analysis approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The step-by-step approach enabled me to provide clear and accurate data analysis. The interviews I conducted become written transcripts. I analyzed the data by reviewing the transcripts to code for common words and phrases. After completing the coding, I identified and developed the themes. I carefully and consistently reviewed the transcripts several times to gather significant data. The process had taken time as I wanted to ensure I had the information as accurately as possible. Throughout the data analysis process, I looked for similarities and differences in the information from the participants' responses to the interview questions. The similarities and differences allowed me to code the data and establish themes. I focused and worked on the data collection to ensure that the conceptual framework and research question connected with the data analysis. I considered using a software program to assist with the data analysis which was determined. I made the decision to transcribe the data myself. Because confidentiality was extremely important, I ensured the data was safe, secure, and handled well.

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Issues of Trustworthiness

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For the trustworthiness of my study, I ensured credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability existed. According to Anney (2014), for qualitative

researchers, credibility comes through my spending time with the participants' responses to analyze them. I reflected on all the data and to thoughtfully consider the data to gain greater insight of the information. Transferability was determined by the richness of the data and how representative the experiences appear in relationship to other HBCU alumni, for example. I anticipated that the data would provide a thick description specific to the participants' experiences with persistence and fictive kinships.

Dependability had taken place through transcript review, my journaling, and my audit trails of my coding and analysis. I sought feedback from my chair and committee member when I needed it to establish the dependability of the results. Journaling and audit trails assisted me with keeping track of the data and referencing back to it as needed. Bowen (2009) noted audit trails provided clear proof that researchers did not discover what they intended to locate. Journaling and audit trails had taken place throughout the data analysis.

Confirmability occurred through reflexive journals. I created a reflexive journal. By having a reflexive journal, I did self-referencing as to how I related to the data. Anney (2014) stated researchers should have a reflexive journal that included every occurrence and individual reflections that related to the study. Reflecting on the data helped me view the information from the perspective of the participants (Bourke, 2014). I was objective with the data. I found the research personal as I attended and graduated from an HBCU. I have friends and fraternity brothers who are alumni. I eliminated my biases by embracing the information I received and be in expectation of new knowledge on this subject**.**

Ethical Procedures

I initially received cooperation and permission from one HBCU to use their alumni office as a source for sending the email invitations once I received Walden University IRB approval. However, after considerable recruitment challenges with that cooperating HBCU, I updated my IRB application and received approval for change in procedure to include any HBCU alumni and their related fraternity social media groups. I recruited participants and collected data by following the guidelines set out in the proposal and on the IRB application. Prior to conducting interviews, I obtained the agreed to informed consent from each participant. The informed consent states that their consent was voluntary, their information was confidential, and at any time they could withdraw from the study. Also, the informed consent indicated that pseudonyms replaced the names of participants, and that no information would be revealed as to their identity in participating in this study. Participants had the right to agree to participate in the study, to change their mind and chose to withdraw. I respect this decision because participating in a research study was not for everyone.

Protecting the confidential data, I secured all data collected and related materials in my home password-protected computer and a locked file for 5 years. The releasing of the data will not happen. I will do everything I can to protect the confidentiality of the data. Because of security purposes, no one besides myself and my committee has access to the data. After 5-years, destroying the data will occur.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I have addressed the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and the methodology for college persistence and fictive kinship of African American male alumni from an HBCU. The participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis were addressed as well. I concluded the chapter with issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the role fictive kin relationships played in the persistence and degree completion by African American male alumni at an HBCU. Institutions addressed retention, but many wrestled with encouraging persistence of African American males beyond admission (Simmons, 2017). In this chapter, I will report on the setting and what occurred in the recruitment process. Along with this, I will report on the demographics of the participants, the interviews, and coding. The chapter also includes the data collection and data analysis processes, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary.

Setting

Initially, I was working with an HBCU in rural Northeastern U.S. to recruit African American male alumni to participate in my study who persisted to their graduation between 2009–2019 and indicated that they had fictive kinships. However, no one responded to my email invitation forwarded to their alumni from the participating HBCU. Because there were no responses, I requested in an addendum application and received permission from Walden University's IRB to post my invitation on social media HBCU alumni groups and fraternity groups. From social media, I received four responses, and three of them participated. I proceeded by emailing the informed consent to the three males. All three participants consented and from there, the interviews were scheduled. The participants were transparent and willing to share their HBCU and fictive kin relationship experiences. After conducting and completing each interview, I tried snowball recruiting where I asked each participant if they knew anyone who met the

criteria and would be interested in participating in my study if they would share my invitation. From snowballing, I received two more participants. After conducting and completing these interviews, I continued to do snowballing to get more participants. But because there no responses from snowballing, I reposted my invitation on social media. After reposting, I recruited three more participants. The informed consent was emailed to the participants, they consented, and their interviews were scheduled. All the participants are African American male alumni who persisted in college to graduation with the support of fictive kin. Each participant's life experiences provided relevant information to my research question.

Demographics

The participants attended and graduated from different HBCUs in the United States. The HBCUs were in the Southeast, South Central, and Mid-Atlantic regions. The participants resided in the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and Southwest regions and graduated between 1994 and 2015. There was one participant who dropped out of college but was able to return to college, finish, and graduate. Because of a circumstance that occurred in undergraduate school, another participant dropped out of college for a semester. But with the support and involvement of his fictive kin, the participant returned and completed.

There were two participants who were married. One of the married participants had children. All the participants were professional African American males. Two participants were working toward obtaining a doctorate degree. Additionally, four out of the eight participants were in a fraternity. Two of the participants joined their fraternity while in undergraduate school. The other two joined on the graduate level.

All the participants shared their college persistence, the significance of fictive kinships, and the role these individuals played in their lives. The participants were successful African American male alumni from an HBCU with fictive kin relationships who persisted through college to graduation. Table 1 lists the participants using their pseudonyms, the year they graduated, the geographic area of the HBCU, and their profession.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participants (pseudonyms)	Graduation year	HBCU geographic area	Profession
Joshua	2010	South Central	Sales and marketing manager
Isaiah	2015	Southeast	Creative services and graphic design director
Jeremiah	2008	South Central	Process engineer
Ezekiel	2008	Southeast	Residence life director
Matthew	2000	Southeast	College professor
Mark	1994	Mid-Atlantic	Benefits expert
Luke	2013	Southeast	PhD student-educational leadership
John	2012	Mid-Atlantic	Attorney

Data Collection

I recruited a total of eight participants who were African American male alumni from various HBCUs in the United States who persisted to graduation with the support of their fictive kin. The participants contacted me through email expressing their interest in participating in the study. The informed consent form was emailed to each participant. As I received their consent forms, I scheduled interviews by asking the participants if they could give me three dates and times they were available. Then I scheduled the interviews through Zoom meetings. The length of time for the interviews was between 30 and 60

minutes. The interviews were conducted through Zoom meetings since the participants resided in various geographic regions. All interviews were scheduled to accommodate the participants, including two who lived in different time zones. I conducted interviews over the course of 4 weeks largely due to recruitment issues and availability of the participants.

The data were recorded through Zoom's live transcribe, a component of Zoom. The interviews occurred with live transcribe recording the interviews in the chat section of zoom and through closed caption. The participants were informed about recording and live transcribe. All agreed to the interview process.

The transcriptions were reviewed several times to verify their accuracy and get all the information the participants shared in the interview. As the participants were speaking, they did not always complete their sentences and occasional "uh" and "ums" were included. Since it was important to capture the completeness and transparency of the interviews, the transcriptions are a true reflection of what the participants spoke about their experiences.

Data Analysis

The data analysis plan I used was the step-by-step analysis approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data analysis began with reviewing the transcriptions several times to get all the information the participants shared in the interviews. As the participants were speaking, they did not always complete their sentences, but they expressed what they wanted to communicate. It was important to capture the completeness and transparency from the interviews. After completing the review of each interview transcript, I began

coding, seeking words and phrases that were the same as or similar. Through open coding (Burkholder et al., 2016), I searched for common themes.

I repeatedly reviewed the similarities in the wording that the participants used. The transcripts were scrutinized. In doing so, the codes and themes were developed. Four words were so repetitive throughout the transcripts as codes that they also became the themes of the results. Table 2 addresses those four code words—supportive, involved, friends, family—as themes with three subthemes from within the theme of supportive from the analyzed transcripts. In addition to my own analysis, I reviewed my findings with a coding workshop conducted by faculty with my peers.

Table 2

Development of Themes, and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Supportive nature of fictive kin in college persistence	Mentor Helper Motivator
Involvement of fictive kin throughout college life	
Friendship roles of fictive kin	
Family roles when and where needed	

Discrepant Cases

Throughout the data analysis, I looked at and analyzed the transcripts to determine if there were any discrepant cases. One participant spoke about his experience in graduate school beyond his HBCU experience. But I determined that his HBCU, and

fictive kin experience connected with the codes, themes, and subthemes. Because of this connection, there were no discrepant cases.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

For the evidence of trustworthiness, I focused on the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of my study. Through data analysis, I spent time analyzing each participant's responses. I consistently reviewed the data to gain meaningful understanding through analysis and reflexivity. Because the data were not focused on only one HBCU's alumni as originally planned but various HBCU alumni from different universities, the transferability was established through the richness of the data and the thick description distinctive to the participants' experiences with persistence and fictive kinships.

Credibility

Credibility has to do with issues of consistency between the participants' views and how the researcher represents them (Ryan et al., 2007). Along with recording the interviews, I did notetaking, and I recorded my reflections in a reflective journal. After a thorough review and completion of the transcripts, I emailed the transcripts to the participants for their review. The credibility occurred from the participant's agreeing to the information in the transcripts. The data reached saturation as the eight participants provided the similar information, which increased the credibility of the study.

Transferability

Transferability occurs when research extends to a broader population (Shenton, 2004). Because of the richness of the data represented by alumni from various HBCUs,

the data provided evidence of transferability. The data provided evidence that African American male alumni received support from fictive kin before college while they were in college and in their professional lives. The interview protocol and probes also supported the transferability for the study. The participants referred to fictive kin in their childhood, family who had fictive kin, college support, and continuing relationships beyond college. Because the participants were from different HBCUs, the thick descriptions provided by the participants about their experiences with college persistence and fictive kinships appears transferable through the stages the participants described in their relationships.

Dependability

Dependability ensures that all the information from the study is supported by the data received from the participants (Cohen et al., 2011; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Through extensive review of my transcripts, journaling, and audit trails of my coding and analysis, dependability was determined. As I read through each transcript thoroughly, I realized that the participants shared their individual stories of their personal experiences with college persistence and fictive kin.

Confirmability

Confirmability shows that the data are from the study (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Audit trails present a clear indication that the researcher did not discover only what they intended to find (Bowen, 2009). I reviewed the interviews several times to ensure I had accurately recorded all the information. I did notetaking and transcript review. The

participants reviewed their own transcripts for accuracy as well. Through journaling and audit trails of my coding and analysis, I established confirmability.

Results

The research question in this basic qualitative study was "How do African American male alumni from a HBCU describe the role fictive kin relationships played in their college persistence to graduation?" The responses to the interview protocol and probes answered the research question and addressed the conceptual frameworks fictive kin relationships (Brooks & Allen, 2016) and persistence theory in higher education (Tinto, 2017a). The results indicated that fictive kinships played a significant role in the college persistence of African American male alumni from an HBCU.

Several codes were established from the data. The codes were supportive, involved, friends, family, blood relations, bond, church members, close, connection, fraternity, friendly competition, and sense of belonging. After the data were analyzed, I determined that certain codes were consistently present in the transcripts. I narrowed the codes down and translated them into themes. From the data, four themes and three subthemes emerged in the study. The first of the four themes—supportive nature of fictive kin in college persistence—resulted in three subthemes: mentors, helpers, and motivators. The remaining three themes were involvement of fictive kin throughout college life, friendship roles of fictive kin, and family roles when and where needed.

Theme 1: Supportive Nature of Fictive Kin in College Persistence

The first theme I discovered in the interview responses was that fictive kin are supportive. The word "supportive" appeared consistently throughout the data, showing

that each participant noted fictive kin as supportive related to their ability to persist in college. Each participant expressed in their own way how fictive kin were supportive in their persistence.

Joshua was an HBCU alumnus who graduated in 2010. His current profession involved being a sales and marketing manager. Joshua described his fictive kin who were friends:

> they contributed to my college persistence because they inspired me to fight and defend myself in regards to academia…. I believe that one time, early on in my college career that whatever grade you receive that was the grade that you desire. And then I realized that I can contest and fight for my academics, based on my own academic standing, my worth. And I remember, speaking and discussing that with my friend. And they also believed that I should pursue a resolution to a lot of my academic grades based on my dedication, my personal rigor ++, my activeness in the classroom to fight and get the grades that I truly deserve… their friendship, their support, their helping hand, their ears, definitely inspired me to continue on an academic excellence, as well as fight and defend for my academic standing while I was in college…. If there was any time where a personal situation inside … the HBCU campus of the university that that would allow me to still stay … focused on what my goal. My goal was to graduate, as well as if there was anything that was happening in my personal life outside of the [campus] gates meaning any personal family losses or any situations like that, [they had] a communicative or a talkative ear to lend…. My personal experiences [with fictive

kin helped] me a great deal be who I am today as well as graduate from school. So, just to have the support of those fictive kinships and those friends, male, and female, that were there for me inside the classroom, I outside the classroom as well as social life.

Joshua described the support from his fictive kin as helping hands, listening ears, and giving him the incentive to fight not only for grades, but to finish college. The support Joshua received extended from academics to personal experiences.

Isaiah, an HBCU alumnus graduated in 2015 became a director at a HBCU. Isaiah stated that his fictive kin continued to provide support and contributed to his college persistence.

They all find ways to continually have an impact, even though, you know, we're in different states, our schedules, I mean … having two or three mentors that are HBCU presidents, that still have the availability or the flexibility that if I need to text them and say hey, I need to talk, they will stop what they're doing to talk. I mean it's … something that I can't, that I can't take for granted but then also something that you know that I must always cherish because I know that after I graduated like those are pieces and those are actions that were taken that really helped to sustain and push me forward. Even so much that when I was writing … my personal statement for [college admissions], you know I had about five different PhDs giving me insight or add this, take this away. "Why did you say that that doesn't make any sense?" So, you know, you know, it's definitely a great feeling to have that support, even now after I've graduated … and so I think that

they played a role that transcended you know just my regular academic piece of course, I mean, you know, in that regard I wanted to make sure that I did them, you know did right by them by, you know, making them proud in, in, in doing right but I don't I don't think they necessarily had as much of an impact from the academic side as they did the social piece.

Isaiah shared that his fictive kin were supportive by being available or flexible for him when he needed them. He does not take this support for granted. Isaiah mentioned he cherished what he received from his fictive kin.

Jeremiah was an HBCU alumni graduating in 2008. He stated in relation to his fictive kin and college persistence,

They're like if you think about it's like your counsel…. I mean in the corporate world they call it board of directors, but I've always had like a counsel where if I have these problems…I'll call them…. they've been very good about helping me with…when it comes to money where to put the money. Also, how to approach negotiations. That's the one thing I didn't have coming out of undergrad…because some people are graduated before me. When we started talking about [say] you want to go to this place, make sure they have this, this and that and make sure the money's right and things like that. They've been very helpful post-college with those kind of things… I would say just like you would need to use those kinships to get you through like they're going to be the ones who actually show you a different way or help you… And that's the only thing and I think that's what makes you persistent colleges like that network that you build they're just helping

you get through like that network is useful later in life, but they're most useful like when you're they're trying to actually get through the program.

Jeremiah stated, "They're like if you think about it's like your counsel…. I mean in the corporate world they call it board of directors, but I've always had like a counsel where if I have these problems…" Jeremiah spoke of the support from his fictive kin as counsel, giving him advice. He found this support to be valuable. This support also helped Jeremiah to persist through college.

Ezekiel was an HBCU alumni graduating in 2008. He talked about his fictive kin as being

> very supportive. We talk, not regularly but we, you know we check in and you know there. Even though we don't talk they let me know how much they are tracking, you know what I'm doing and just looking in so whether it's Facebook or other social media platforms that we are connected connected with, you know, they're always supportive.

Ezekiel stated, "Even though we don't talk they let me know how much they are tracking, you know what I'm doing and just looking in so whether it's Facebook or other social media platforms that we are connected connected with, you know, they're always supportive." Ezekiel's fictive kin was supportive by being connected with him. Although they may not communicate regularly, the relationship is still intact. Ezekiel felt the fictive kin connections remained through social media.

Matthew was an HBCU alumni who graduated in 2000 and was an HBCU college professor at the time of the interview. He responded how supportive his fictive kin were and how they helped him persist through college

> Oh, gosh, in every way during college…. They were [and still] consider each other brothers and sisters, especially my alumni. The relationship strengthened [since being a kid]. But when you become an adult and you see life… then you see what they bring to the table [for] you. Things change, things change greatly. And so, my relationships with all of my fictive kin have become stronger, especially because there are just within human nature. There are these yearnings for us to connect with other people. And for me, not having a huge family immediate, and even extended. Most of the members of…my immediate family are dead. A good deal the members of my extended family are gone. And so those relationships, I'm not saying they would ever replace those people that were of lineage that I can remember fondly. But I will say those Christmas holidays, Thanksgiving, New Year's, birthdays, cookouts in the backyard, those… moments with the fictive kin resubmit, our connection. Yeah, so I'll say it's gotten stronger. And again, they've been there…. I went to HBCU you know, if it weren't, I don't know how it was at the HBCUs that you know I, if it were not for my fictive kin at my HBCU, I would not have finished.

Matthew stated, "And so, my relationships with all of my fictive kin have become stronger, especially because there are just within human nature." Matthew found that the support of his fictive kin stemmed from long standing relationships. He mentioned the

relationships growing strong with time. Matthew also stated the supportive nature of his fictive kin helped him complete college.

Mark, an HBCU alumni graduated in 1994 has had a long professional career in benefits. Mark stated,

> With the thing I looked at it [was] him making sure that I couldn't do a lot of stuff on campus. But he…let me know what was happening…. I wasn't a good typist. So, with my papers and stuff, he would proofread, you know, because a lot of times I did my papers, it was like the hunt and peck method. But he was there to assure… no matter how long it takes you to do your paper you still will get it done and get it back, you know, turned in on time…. I had a project that was due, and I was running… behind. And he was like, "whenever you get started, I can help…. knock out some of your typing for you. Just give me the research, and I could put it together." So, he helped me out. [At the time] I was living out, I lived on campus my freshman year, but when I had my son…. I had to work, and I moved back home [to where] I had to catch three buses. [But] campus was near where he was going…. So, I rode with him…. That cut off the transportation, having to get up extra early…. His persistence, making sure I've stayed in [college]…. he cut down some of the barriers that affected me while I was in school. That helped continue our relationship [and me] to grow as strong as he did.

Mark stated, "I had a project that was due, and I was running… behind. And he was like, whenever you get started, I can help…. knock out some of your typing for you.

Just give me the research, and I could put it together'." … "I had to work, and I moved back home [to where] I had to catch three buses. [But] campus was near where he was going…. So, I rode with him…. That cut off the transportation, having to get up extra early…." Mark noted his fictive kin was supportive by assisting him with completing assignments and transportation when he lived off campus. His fictive kin were persistent which allowed Mark to persist. Because of the support he received, Mark was able to continue and finish college.

Luke was an HBCU alumni who graduated in 2013 and was continuing his education in a doctoral program in educational leadership. Luke discussed his fictive kin relationship and college persistence in the context of his continued education.

I think in the frame of our conversation about higher ed and college environments my first person in mind becomes my undergraduate choir professor…. She was my first mother on a campus without being solely related to me. [She] was a gem; she gave me so much love. Tough love, really supportive environments. She actually was my very first black teacher ever. I didn't have black teachers in my…experience…. She was the first person who actually got me interested in going to [my HBCU], offering the choir scholarship and so she was my mother for a lot of reasons. She offered really great life advice, outside of the music: really how to be respectful of elders, how to take in great words of wisdom, how to humble myself, and that was a lot of work…. and to make sure that I really was looking toward finding out the life lessons that we learned in college. And it came sometimes with some really great supportive strategies with that, with some tough

love…. [She] held me accountable for my success at the institution. If I wasn't in class, she would come find me. [She] actually had a reputation of going into residence halls and finding students in the residence hall and bringing them to class. She and I, and other folks, where people would have me to persist and to graduate and so it took me five years to get out of undergrad, but when I did, I felt like they were just so proud of me.

Luke stated, "She was my first mother on a campus without being solely related to me. [She] was a gem; she gave me so much love. Tough love, really supportive environments." To Luke, his fictive kin was as supportive as his mother. He described the close relationship he had with his fictive kin. Luke stated his fictive kin offered good advice and showed him tough love. Through the support of his fictive kin, Luke was able to persist through college to completion.

John, an HBCU alumni graduated in 2012 became an attorney. John stated:

I'm grateful… for the experience because the experience taught me even in moments in my professional life where…you may get tired, may get frustrated. [But] I can fall back onto my experiences that I've had at my HBCU], watching others being encouraged by others, encouraging others that you can make it…. I'm grateful for the support that was there that taught me how to support myself when nobody's else around and I would encourage anyone to go to an HCBU. But going there and being with my professors being with my colleagues and friends, I got to learn it for myself and apply my own values and desires and make the persistence personable.

John stated, "I'm grateful for the support that was there that taught me how to support myself when nobody's else around and I would encourage anyone to go to an HCBU." For John, his fictive kin provided support that strengthen his HBCU experience. He learned with the support of others; he could support himself. John mentioned he was grateful for the support provided by his fictive kin.

Each participant described the supportive nature of fictive kinships that contributed to their college persistence. The support was essential and helped the participant navigate through college to graduation.

Subtheme 1: Mentor

The first subtheme of the supportive theme found in the data involved statements participants used to describe their fictive kin as mentors. As Isaiah conveyed his first mentor as fictive kin: "My godfather… was kind of just there when I was born." He added a number of other people who served as mentors "that came by my mom's relationship with my godparents," which related to his current employer. "I was actually introduced to [my current employer] through another college president, who was one of my mentors."

> But a lot of people came through…mutual beneficial relationships [or] provided
> services or I…was beneficial to them in one way. And they saw the potential for
> greater in me and they kind of stuck to me and [because of me] being a person
> that understands the benefit of a mentor mentee relationship stuck to them and it
> just kind of went from there.

Jeremiah found the fictive kin who became mentors as:

essential… because those are people that you end up like spending all your leisure time with…. One thing about it is that everyone thinks that college is going to be about chasing women but like the male relationships are going to be the stronger ones because those are the people that should [be] mentoring. Those are the people that you're working with. Those are people that you're helping on a day-to-day basis.

Ezekiel had a long history of fictive kin who served as mentors:

I would start with the first mentors that I've ever [had], or I would equate those to, as we discussed mentors. And those are the relationships that I've built in college. I have three that come to mind. One…was director of student activities and leadership…. Another was my theater professor…. And the last one is my Spiritual Pastor Father; I've called my spiritual father…. And so all three of those really have poured into me over the years. They were a huge support system while I was in college and then even, you know, when I graduated and went to pursue a master's and continue this work that I do in higher education. They've all been pivotal roles in, you know, just giving me wisdom and life experience and even challenging me. And so, in challenging me in some of the best ways to, of course, not be complacent but to think outside of my own way of thinking and consider other perspectives. And so, those relationships…have been very pivotal in who I am as a person, but then also who I am professionally.

Luke had a fictive kin whom he described as a mentor:

I always made sure to showed up for class if I had to and she really taught me so much, so much more outside of the class than even inside the classroom and so much more about life than music…. [E]ven to this day, although…I changed my major after my sophomore year, to another major outside of music, [we] stayed in great communication, and we still speak to this day. I still go back, and I serve in the choir every year, because she meant that much to me. But [she] was very special as a, as someone who was not related to me because she really made me feel like I have somewhere to go on campus and then somewhere I felt like family on campus. [S]he really made me feel that I really had a sense of mattering. So, she was a very special person.

Subtheme 2: Helper

Another way fictive kin were described by some participants in being supportive was in their role as helper. As Joshua described:

Them just being there and lending a helpful hand, a helpful hand and an ear, and a heart to listen to, somebody to lean on. Definitely allowed me to graduate and be where I am upon graduation.

Isaiah provided this example:

The president at [my HBCU] had a saying; education is the surest vehicle to upward mobility in the world. And I always looked at… that saying and it's funny because you know as students, we always joked about his little catchphrases that he would say over and over and over and over and over and over again. Any publication he was in, he would say that, or he would say one of his other little

buzz phrases, but you know those phrases actually helped me to move forward and help me to remember, all right, Isaiah you need to graduate.

Jeremiah described the helping relationship he has with one of his fictive kin: "[He] was in my wedding. And I was at his wedding, and he lives [near me] and every so often we'll check on each other, and then we'll exchange ideas, will talk about life, and we'll help each other even with our careers."

Subtheme 3: Motivator

Motivation was another purpose that fictive kin were described as serving supportively by some participants. Joshua described his fictive as a motivator with his college persistence:

Yeah uh, the fighting for or if my just being there emotionally in academically for me whether I was going to go speak to administration, go speak to the board, go speak to the teacher themselves or whatnot. They were always encouraging me and motivated me. One of my closest friends, he motivated me to continue on and figure out where I was going with my academics, knowing that I came there to finish, I didn't come here just to be there, but I came there to actually graduate.

Isaiah found his fictive kin relationships' engagement and interest as source of motivation:

I would definitely say that they, they were, you know, sources of motivation you know going to their offices or talking to them and, you know, seeing the degrees on their wall, you know, seeing the accolades that they received and saying, you know, hey, I can do that too. And then of course…being there for the tough

conversations and the 'all right Isaiah need to kick in the butt' too. [Just] keep going and doing the right thing.

Jeremiah indicated that "The other side is the social aspect. These are… people that you then tend to hang out with and go places with…and you enjoy their company, and they're the ones that motivate you to stick with it."

John articulated the motivating role some fictive kin played as follows:

The only real fictive relationships that I had that were a motivating factor as far as college is concerned. I had some individuals in my church that were in college, ahead of me, but I didn't really see them because they were away at school, but when they will come back during spring break during the summer… I got to live vicariously through their stories about college. But if there was any fictive relationship guidance as far as college is concerned, it would be that sort of that vicarious living through their stories about pledging about… learning new experiences in school and stuff like that. And saying… what I can't wait to go to college and do that too.

Theme 2: Involvement of Fictive Kin Throughout College Life

The second theme that was evidenced in the interview data was that fictive kin are people who are involved in the lives of the participants – not just outside observers. The participants noted the involvement of their fictive kin that lead to college persistence to graduation from an HBCU in the following ways.

Joshua's response:

They were very involved with my college experience because they were the ones that supported me emotionally, and spiritually, as well as academically, to actually graduate and finished my degree.…[T]hey were always there for me to bounce off different ideas, whether it was inside or outside of the classroom. They were always there for me especially those that I actually had class with, or we shared the same major.

Isaiah indicated that:

I would definitely say they were very involved. The marching band culture, particularly at an HBCU is one that if a band student doesn't show up to class, they don't call the student they don't call the students' parents, they call the band, and the band director gets on the student!... My former band director was absolutely imperative to my success now.

Ezekiel described their involvement in this way, "Because they were right there on the campus [with me], I couldn't go days at a time without [them] stopping by, or them calling [so I would say they were] very involved, very present."

Mark described his fictive kin in being quite involved in a number of decision-making times while in college:

[W]hen I was in college, I became a teenage parent. I was deciding [whether] to go in the military. So, I dropped out of semester and [since the military was] taking long, he said, "Mark, you know you might as well go to school and finish." Which I took that advice, went back, and I still graduated got my bachelor's. So that…pushed me and being like the backbone of making sure I finished. Even

though I had a child, I still went to school and work at the same time. But I

finished a goal that I had planned to get my degree.

Luke's fictive kin: "was really involved in my love for the university. I appreciate

him for that because he made me feel that I really felt at home and loved [my HBCU] for

that reason."

John described a group of fictive kin that were very involved with each other:

We were very involved. I have a core group that we would always study together.

We would always, you know, prepare for exams together. I can remember

specifically senior year trying to get through what we had at [our HBCU] called

the senior comp, the senior comprehensive exams. So, in my group, everybody

wanted to study with my group. But we were like, no, because of the importance

of this exam, we want to study amongst ourselves because we knew each other,

we had gone through three years, three and a half years of, you know, weeding

through people that weren't serious and not motivated and didn't bond with us

through good times and tough times. And so, we were very involved in each

other's growth and development. And even to this day we may not speak for

months on end, but if we reach out on Facebook or send a text is like, no time has

gone by.

John stated, "And so, we were very involved in each other's growth and development."

The involvement of fictive kin allowed John to grow and develop as well as persist,

complete and graduate from his HBCU,

In this section, participants expressed involvement of fictive kin throughout college life. The involvement of fictive kin enabled them to persist and graduate from college.

Theme 3: Friendship Roles of Fictive Kin

For the third theme, participants emphasized their fictive kin as friends. Such friendships were important to their college persistence. In portraying his fictive kin in a friendship role, Joshua stated:

I feel like [the social aspect] is a big selling point [of] the experience… at my [HBCU]alma mater…. The fictive kinships that I had were the fun part of it, the supportive part of it, academic part of it. They were there, they were, they always will be here. They always gonna be there, and I just feel like we have [an] understanding that having those bonds and having those relationships are key part and success in life success at school success every day. We talk about mental health and…being able to communicate and have friends and maintain healthy relationships is a big part of life.…I believe the fictive kinships that I had, especially trying to attain a goal [of graduating] was necessary and mandatory from my own personal success.

Joshua stated, "The fictive kinships that I had were the fun part of it, the supportive part of it, academic part of it." …. I believe the fictive kinships that I had, especially trying to attain a goal [of graduating] was necessary and mandatory from my own personal success." Joshua's friendships were an

important of his college experience. He felt the fictive kinships were needed and contributed to his personal success.

Joshua also described another aspect of fictive kin's role in college persistence through friendship:

Wherever I was a class with some of my fictive kinships, or outside of class…we interacted because of the dormitories, or we came from the same city or state or whatnot; whatever bonds that were built on whatever meeting or connections that we had that led us to becoming friends.

Jeremiah's example was that: "I have… these the people you call your friends once you're out of school, the people that you still keep up with, and …you don't actually have to always hear from them, but when you do it kind of pick up where you left off."

Mark described fictive kin and friendship:

I have a best friend. He lived across the street…. We've been friends...over 35 or 36 years. We…both… lived with our grandparents when we were younger. Both were honor roll students, both loved playing basketball. Think we, we fed off each other because of our common interests. We were going to college and being in school and I think he looked up to me because I'm two years older…. [We] winded up going to [the same HBCU]. He started out in accounting, but it didn't work out for him. He didn't like it, so he changed and went over to marketing, and then went back and got his master's which worked out much better for him…. [W]e have common interests. We are the godparents of each of our children. We

celebrate milestones…together.…. Our parents we grew up together and everything.

Mark stated, "I have a best friend. He lived across the street…. We've been friends...over 35 or 36 years…. We are the godparents of each of our children. We celebrate milestones…together.…. Our parents we grew up together and everything." Mark described his fictive kin as a friend he has with long-standing relationship. That friendship has existed for many years.

> Matthew reiterated an example of how fictive kin involved supportive friendships:
> I remember when I was on Nickelodeon. When I got that gig… oh my gosh
> people went crazy. We didn't have Facebook and Twitter, but they were calling
> everybody you know [saying] he's on Nickelodeon….my first movie role… and
> so it continues even to this day. Even fictive kin [were] my mom's friends… her
> fictive kin who have become my de facto fictive kin will call me to this day. One
> of my mom's friends…I still call her Miss [female name], not Auntie [female
> name], just Miss [female name] …. My mom bought her baby his first set of
> diapers. And she's just been my mom's friend. They went to high school together.
> So, they've been friends for, gosh, 50 plus years. And [she] called me yesterday
> was like, 'baby I just wanted to make sure you've eaten.' Mind you my mom died
> in 2019 and so literally right after my mother passed away Miss [female name]
> was just cooking and 'Okay, I need to make sure you ate,' and she's calling me. I
> [responded]…. 'Miss [female name], [if] I haven't eaten by now I'd be dead, you
> know,' but anytime she cooks she will call it let me know. [She] will just cook

and cook and cook, and so I am honored to have those people who still will call in

just say, you know, I remember your mama. You know I love, I miss her, and just

called a check on me. So, those fictive kin moments are, they've brought me into

today.

Matthew stated, "Even fictive kin [were] my mom's friends… her fictive kin who have

become my de facto fictive kin will call me to this day." Matthew shared fictive kin as

friends that began with his mother's fictive kin.

The friends the participants described as fictive kin emphasized their close

relationship. These friends lead to persistence through college to graduation.

Theme 4: Family Roles When and Where Needed

In the fourth theme, participants described their fictive kin as acting like family in

their persistence to graduation. They had that close bond with fictive kin as they

identified them as family. Joshua described fictive kin as a multigenerational family

interested in his life and progress:

> I was either connected through family like friends, a family or whatnot. Like play
>
> cousins, uncles, or people that I grew up with just around in my neighborhood.
>
> They did because. I do have a lot of people that I've grown up with I can consider
>
> cousins or, or sisters or brothers or whatnot that I've just known for a long amount
>
> of time. One of my fictive kinships or a couple of my fictive kinships did come
>
> out of my mother's fictive kinships with her people when she attended college
>
> undergraduate. So, from her fictive kinships and then growing up, and being
>
> friends with her friends, children or whatnot that built my fictive kinship as well.

So, and then on top of that, a lot of my kinships just like I say it came from my academic institution, some high school, middle school, elementary. Those are the type of people that I really connected with him begin quality friendships in a fictive kinships with based off of you know just going to school seeing somebody every day. Then once again in college, living that down the hall from them or living in another building and building those friendships and those relationships and going to class, going to the cafeteria. Coming back to your dormitory and seeing on a regular one that definitely needs to have a quality fictive kinship [to persist in college].

Joshua stated, "I do have a lot of people that I've grown up with I can consider cousins or, or sisters or brothers or whatnot that I've just known for a long amount of time." To Joshua, fictive kin were like family because of the amount of time and the relationship he has with those persons.

Isaiah described a life full of fictive kin relationships that have played a role of family in multiple aspects of his life, including persistence in college:

I have several people that are not related to me by blood or marriage that are just as important to me as my family that are related to me by blood or marriage, particularly as I look from a professional side. My current boss. He's like an older brother and the best friend. We have a connection where we can talk about literally a range of things from you know, what I have going on professionally to, you know, the basketball game that just happen, to asking questions on how to be the boss on a video game. I'm trying to figure out something that's going on with

my car. We have a very close relationship. Of course, people like my godfather who pretty much served as a surrogate father. My father was in my life, but he was not very active or present. And so having those surrogates that come from people like my godfather and men that were in the church that I grew up in and even to this day that I still have connections with. They will be in there very, very connected and very important to me.

And then as I go, went through my higher education career, I had specifically two people. One deceased, and the other still living currently, a professor at my alma mater. And both of them took me under their wing and you know I mean from going to their house and eaten dinner to, you know, I, they needed to move, and they call Isaiah, to get some help, you know. Our relationship has gone far beyond a student and teacher relationship and definitely look at them as like, you know, aunts and uncles and things of that nature so I think that the development and shape, shaping of who I am today is directly related to those type of connections that I've had that transcend my immediate family or even my blood related family or people that are related through marriage.

Isaiah stated, "My current boss. He's like an older brother and the best friend…. Of course, people like my godfather who pretty much served as a surrogate father." Isaiah spoke of fictive as family, placing them in the role of older brother and surrogate. His fictive kin held an essential place in his life.

Ezekiel specifically saw a connection between his fictive kin relationship as family and college persistence: "Because I was so persistent in college [it] has…led to lifelong friends who I consider family, …shape, how I lead in my position is today."

Mark, in describing his fictive kin spoke of him as his brother:

I have another friend…. We could consider ourselves brothers…. We grew up in the same area, but…he went in the military. When he came home, that's when we formed a bond. And…we're not a blood relation, but everybody sees us together when we hang out, stuff and, doing things, they already think we're brothers. So, when we meet people, yeah, that's my brother. So, people have said, 'Hey I haven't seen your brother'.

John mentioned and associated specific family members when he talked about fictive kin:

I have several fictive relationships based upon various spheres. So, like for example my church family. You can say a fictive type relationship. Those I have grown up with that are like my brothers like my sisters and love like my brothers, like my sisters. We're close, as if they were one of my, you know, blood relatives, even though we're not related by blood, so I have that fictive ecosphere that relationship there.

These participants all recognized the family-like relationships they had with their fictive kin and that because of the nature of those relationships, their fictive kin were considered the same as family.

Summary

The data analysis provided the answer to the research question. Four themes and three subthemes emerged from the data. All participants offered information that indicated fictive kin played a role in their college persistence. The participants shared different experiences with fictive kin, which lead to similarities in their description of the relationships. Another similarity is that fictive kin were positive relationships that helped the participants navigate their way before, during, and beyond college.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the analysis and interpretation of the findings. I will address the literature review in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework. Also, I will discuss the implication for positive social change and recommendations for further research from the findings in my study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the role fictive kin relationships played in the persistence and degree completion by African American male alumni at an HBCU. The basic qualitative approach, as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016), was used to understand individuals or groups in their natural setting. This qualitative research provided in-depth information about the experiences of African American male alumni who persisted through graduation as they developed as students and the role fictive kin relationships played while attending an HBCU. The research question that directed the study was: How do African American male alumni from an HBCU describe the role fictive kin relationships played in their college persistence to graduation?

The participants in the study were asked interview questions about their college persistence and fictive kin relationships while they attended a HBCU. The responses indicated that fictive kin contributed to college persistence to graduation. From the findings, four themes emerged: supportive nature of fictive kin in college persistence (with its three subthemes of mentor, helper, and motivator), involvement of fictive kin throughout college, friendship roles of fictive kin, and family roles when and where needed.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings confirmed and extended knowledge as compared with the conceptual framework and the literature review in Chapter 2. The themes and subthemes captured the nature of college persistence that connected with Tinto's persistence theory in higher

education and Brooks and Allen's (2016) fictive kinship. The findings extended knowledge as both Brooks and Allen and Tinto's (2017a) studies focused on African American students as a whole where my study focused on African American male alumni.

Findings Related to Framework

In Brooks and Allen's (2016) theory, fictive kin are described as "family-like" relationships with non-kin. Such relationships consist of faculty, staff, peers, and church members who were like family. The findings aligned with the framework as the participants identified fictive kin in this manner. Fictive kin were as close as family to the point participants viewed them as family members. Similar to how Brooks and Allen noted fictive kin as a support network for African American college students, the findings in my study showed that fictive kin were a support network for African American male alumni as mentors, helpers, and motivators. The participants described fictive as support, involved, friend, and family. This support was instrumental in their college persistence. They felt this support was necessary and significant for them to complete and graduate from college. Fictive kin were involved with the participants as they played a part in their college experience to graduation. My study thus aligned with the framework for fictive kin relationships as the findings showed fictive kin among the African American male participants.

Tinto (2017a) noted that students need support during their college years to remain motivated to persist to graduation. The earlier students receive that support, the better they can navigate or overcome the difficulties they encounter. Persistence occurs

when students are motivated and engaged in college (Tinto, 2017b). I learned from this current study that the African American male alumni participants were motivated to persist through college with support of their fictive kin. They specifically identified their fictive kin as motivators. The participants shared how they received support and motivation from fictive kin in a number of ways to help them persist to graduation. The participants also expressed that their fictive kin played essential roles through their involvement in both academic and social aspects of their growth and development. This sense of belonging expressed by participants helped them feel supported and able to go on and complete college, just as Tinto noted that a sense of belonging contributes to persistence through academic and social activities. Consequently, my study aligned with Tinto's persistence theory in higher education indicating African American male alumni shared similar experiences in needing the supportive environment to persist to graduation as college students.

Findings Related to Literature

The findings in this current study confirmed the knowledge concerning how fictive kin and college persistence pertains to African Americans, providing further support to the research on African American males. In the literature review, I addressed African Americans and African American males in higher education, fictive kin, and college persistence. In this study I focused on African American male alumni who persisted in college to graduation from HBCUs.

Support from fictive kin is important in the African American community. Having fictive kin relationships in the African American community is a long-term tradition

(Curry & McIntosh, 2020). Similarly, in my study, African American male alumni viewed fictive kin as important enough in their college experience to consider them as family even in their professional lives. Fictive kin provide support along with family, which leads to the academic success of African American males (Farooq et al., 2020). Fictive kin relationships are a positive component for African American youth (Scott & Deutsch, 2021). The findings in my study also indicate that African American male alumni persisted and graduated from an HBCU with support of fictive kin.

Strayhorn's study (2021) noted that with support, African American male college students persisted through college. When African American males have the support their need, they will persist and graduate from college (Brooms, 2018). The findings in my study show that when African American male alumni attended an HBCU, their intent and goal to persist, complete, and graduate was possible with the support of fictive kin relationships. The persistence and completion of college was a milestone in the professional success stories for African American male alumni in this study.

Retention occurs in college when students are engaged fully in college life (Tight, 2020). Retention also occurred at HBCUs when students received support and resources to ensure that they finish and graduation (Chenier, 2019). For some African Americans, HBCUs provided what they needed to succeed academically, emotionally, and socially. HBCUs provided exceptional academic opportunities African Americans as well (Kumah-Abiwu, 2021). What some African Americans needed in a college environment was found in an HBCU that provided a supportive atmosphere for them. The participants study indicated that fictive kin relationships were the source of some of that support for

persistence in college graduation. The findings extend the knowledge about fictive kin relationships and college persistence and broadens the literature for the African American male alumni population.

Limitations of the Study

The study centered around college persistence and fictive kin relationships of African American male alumni from an HBCU. A limitation of the study was the challenge to recruit participants during a global pandemic. Although participants were recruited from various HBCUs through social media, only three HBCU geographical regions were represented. Other geographical regions could have been included, but that did not occur.

Another limitation was the ability to conduct face-to-face interviews. Zoom meetings occurred based on different geographical areas and time zones. All the participants had their cameras on doing the interview. An observation of body language was limited as I could not view the participants' entire body. I was able to observe their facial expressions, tone of their voice, and emphasis to their responses. Despite the limitations, I conducted and completed my interviews and obtained data to be analyzed.

Recommendations

The data in this study indicated that fictive kin played an important role in the college persistence to graduation of African American male alumni who attended an HBCU. Through the literature review in Chapter 2, fictive kinship and persistence were documented to be an important part of the African American college student's experience. Both fictive kin relationships and persistence allowed students to remain in

and complete college. Further research may explore and obtain more information on the experiences of African American male alumni from an HBCU, college persistence, and fictive kinships. A larger number of HBCUs in the U.S region can be considered to obtain a broader sense of the HBCU experience from former students. Further research can be conducted on college persistence and fictive kinships of African American male alumni who attended a predominantly White institution or community college. Along with HBCUs, other institutions should be considered to determine the role fictive kin played in college persistence. Further research may also be conducted with other research designs, such as group interviews or a case study in a program that might be working on the actual fictive kin relationships and college persistence. More research is required to understand the experiences of African American male alumni in a variety of institutions, such as predominately White institutions or a community college. Such information may assist higher education institutions with implementing programs to improve and increase retention.

Implications

From the results of this study regarding college persistence and fictive kinship of African American male alumni from an HBCU, higher education institutions may consider implementing or expanding services to help students create and maintain fictive kin relationships to persist, graduate, and become alumni. Ongoing support from professors, peers, and staff might assist in creating such relationships, giving students an incentive to persist, graduate, and contribute to the institution as alumni.

Higher education administrators could benefit from the study by seeing the importance of providing resources and opportunities, such as supporting fictive kin relationships for African American males. Student affairs and student engagement at HBCUs could focus on their African American male alumni as a source of support and positive role modeling for the current male students. Such individuals offering support may come to be perceived as fictive kin and function as such after graduation. The results and findings from this study could contribute to positive social change as institutions see the importance of fictive kin in college persistence for African American males. If African American males have fictive kin who are present, supportive, involved, and function as family, they may be able to persist, graduate, and become alumni. African American male alumni could have positive experiences that they could share with undergraduates that could become valued for a lifetime. Positive social change may occur as African American males become alumni and successful in their own careers and able to provide similar support as fictive kin for others to help them through their college persistence. African American male alumni may want to give back to their colleges, communities, and businesses by becoming fictive kin to younger men and boys. In society, young African American males need good role models to encourage them to do well in elementary and secondary schools. Such support can extend to college and into a professional career. In the absence of or limited contact with male figures, fictive kin can supplement or substitute support for African American males. Programs such as Boy Brothers, Upward Bound, and athletic events should continue to establish and promote fictive kinships. If every African American male received support from fictive kin and

are willing to become fictive kin, African American males can persevere through elementary, secondary schools, and higher education. African American males can also contribute to society and exemplify greatness in themselves and their fictive kin.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the role fictive kin relationships played in the persistence and degree completion by African American male alumni at an HBCU. The data revealed that fictive kinships played a vital role in the college persistence of African American male alumni. Each participant stated fictive kin was supportive which led to persistence to graduation from their respected HBCUs. They also viewed the role fictive kinships played as involved, friend, family, mentor, helper, and motivator. The participants shared their positive and challenging experiences about their college persistence and fictive kin by being honest and transparent. Some fictive kinships were established prior to college while others developed during college. Each participant believed fictive kin was essential and necessary in the HBCU experience.

Although the backgrounds, college experiences, and professions varied, the common denominator for each participant was fictive kin relationships contributed to their college persistence and completion. The African American male alumni in this study persisted and prevailed to where they are today. Because of fictive kin relationships, they continued through college, graduation, and became successful African American male alumni. This study indicated that African American males could achieve and succeed when they have support. African American male alumni could continue to

thrive and survive with their fictive kin from the college campus to the world awaiting their arrival.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview Guide and Probes

1. Fictive kinships are relationships you have with persons who are not related to you by blood or marriage. Tell me about the people in your life that you would describe as your fictive kin relationships?

2. Tell me how your fictive kinships developed?

3. How involved was your fictive kin with your college experience?

4. As an alumnus looking back on your college experience, how would you describe your fictive kin relationships' contribution to your college persistence?

   Probe: Can you give me an example?

   Probe: Tell me how your fictive kin helped you prepare for college?

   Probe: Can you tell me about a time when your fictive kin helped solve a problem while you were in college?

   Probe: How was the problem resolved with the help of your fictive kin?

   Probe: Since your college completion, how has your fictive kin been supportive to you?

5. How long were you enrolled at the university?

   Probe: What year did you graduate from the university?

   Probe: What is your current occupation?

   Probe: What was your reason for choosing an HBCU as opposed to other colleges?

6. How would you describe your experience as a student at this HBCU?

      Probe: Classroom experience, relationship with professors, interactions

      with peers, level of academic support.

      Probe: Non-classroom experiences – sports, extra-curricular activities,

      work, housing choices?

7. How would you describe what contributed to your persistence to graduate?

8. What obstacles to your persistence toward graduation occurred while you were

  in college?

      Probe: How did you overcome those obstacles?

9. At this time, you may share any thoughts you have about your persistence in

college that we have not discussed.

10. Are there any additional thoughts about your persistence in college or your

fictive kin relationships that you would like to share?