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Black Online College Students' Perceptions of Their Unmet Needs During COVID-19

Zanita Gaither
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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Zanita M. Gaither

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Black Online College Students' Perceptions of Their Unmet Needs During COVID-19

by

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MBA, Texas A& M University, 2013

BS, Western Governors University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Teaching of Psychology

Walden University

January 2025

Abstract

Black college students face unique challenges in achieving academic success, particularly when their unmet needs are not addressed adequately. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these challenges for online learners in this group, impacting motivation and learning experiences. This interpretive phenomenological analysis explored the lived experiences of Black online college students and their perceptions of unmet needs during the pandemic. Despite numerous studies on Black college students during the pandemic, little literature has been focused on their perceptions of unmet needs. To understand their needs and experiences, this study considered internal and external influences based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Rovai's persistence model. Data were collected through semi structured interviews with five Black online college student participants. Data were analyzed using the steps outlined in hermeneutic analysis based on Smith and Nizza's interpretive phenomenological analysis model. From the analysis, personal experiential themes were identified and then grouped to find group experiential themes. Five themes were identified: (a) technological challenges and support needs, (b) community and isolation, (c) impact on well-being and self-esteem, (d) motivation and engagement, and (e) challenges and support. Understanding perceptions of unmet needs among Black online college students during COVID-19 is essential for fostering a supportive learning environment that could empower academic success. The findings from this study have potential implications for positive social change that include addressing these needs to improve retention and academic success and providing resources to support these students effectively.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic could be considered the most dramatic disruption to the higher education system. Cornett and Fletcher (2022) noted that even in non-pandemic times, challenges of basic needs were presented as a struggle in college and university students' abilities to maintain academic success. With basic needs and insecurities not being met and the compounding experiences of unemployment and/or lost wages, Black students, first-generation students, female students, and students who are parents faced increased mental health challenges (Cornett & Fletcher, 2022), which had severe consequences on their cognitive ability to excel academically. The motivation of Black online college students (BOCS) during COVID-19, as measured by academic success, is not readily identifiable in current literature.

This qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) aimed to gain knowledge on the lived experiences of BOCS regarding their perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19. This study is important because current research only supports the general needs of campus-based college and university students. To date, no literature accurately represents the current experiences of BOCS and their perceptions of unmet needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The potential implications of this study could improve the academic outcomes of BOCS, leading to less attrition, improved graduation rates, individual motivation, and an overall improved quality of life for this population of students. Within this chapter, I present the crisis of the unmet needs of BOCS through the frameworks of Maslow's hierarchy of belonging, esteem, and transcendence (BET) needs

and Rovai's composite persistence model. The inquiry into the research question explored BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19, which could be addressed by engaging in authentic participant exploration. Additionally, delving into assumptions, scope, limitations, and significance within this group further enriches the existing literature.

Background

Research was conducted supporting the general needs of campus-based college and university students, as illustrated in the literature review. With a greater than 15-year look back, Eisenberg et al. (2007) reported on perceived needs and access from a college campus-based reflection, acknowledging a non-response bias, suggesting this bias is a comparative representation of the demographic profile like that of the national student population. While their assessment of needs is valuable, it does not speak to the current assessment of needs for Black students, nor the needs among the online population. To date, Lederer et al. (2020) expressed the call for college administration to apply purposeful resources to address the discoverable challenges students are facing in the wake of the pandemic by using their mental health study data. Considerable attention has been granted to the needs of White and other non-people of color, proposing that these data sufficiently identified the overall needs of students attending colleges/universities face-to-face. Nevertheless, the gaps in the literature are evident, including (a) inadequate representation of African Americans within the studies (although limited, there was a seemingly equivalent study explored with a reversed comparison of international students who attended college in the United States [Chen et al., 2019]); (b) learning of the

experiences that pointed toward the unmet needs through assumed explanation (Acharya et al., 2018; Burns & Bagasra, 2022; Hirsch et al., 2021; Hollingsworth, et al., 2017); and (c) the focus of the online learning platform, which had only been observed in its relation to COVID-19 and was limited to only consider first-year college students (Fruehwirth et al., 2021).

Further research would enhance knowledge supporting the lived experiences of the unmet needs of the Black online college population. There are opportunities to connect the unmet needs with support resources. As such, this research could help shift the dynamics of poor academic outcomes and could lead to better personal, mental, and career outcomes for this population.

Problem Statement

Collins free online dictionary (n.d.) described *unmet needs* as lacking something that could improve a situation or an outcome (Unmet needs, n.d.). The scholarly community has limited knowledge of BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19. While an increased risk of physical damage and psychological distress coupled with limited access to care have been identified as a significant crisis during COVID-19 for college students (Becerra et al., 2022), little is known about BOCS' perceptions of additional unmet needs. Lederer et al. (2020) noted that unmet needs for BOCS during COVID-19 could be increased dramatically due to deprivation and additional disparities that went unnoticed and unaddressed; however, current unmet needs remain unknown.

With the current struggles of housing, food, and financial insecurities coupled with developing needs brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, one could not help but wonder where the motivation to maintain academic achievement lies among BOCS since their unmet needs appear ever-increasing. When considering the three general factors of enrollment, graduation, and stress, literature indicates that online enrollment increased by 186% more in 2020 than in 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.); nevertheless, to date, only 62.3% of college students completed their degree within 6 years, and dropout rates are as high as 32.9% (Bareham, 2023). Furthermore, for first-generation college students, the dropout rate is 92.2%, and among Black students, the graduation rate decreases with each year of attempted completion (Bareham, 2023). There is a higher level of psychological distress for completely online students than for students attending face-to-face or hybrid (ElTohamy et al., 2022). The unmet needs of BOCS could be exacerbated by various circumstances or factors that ultimately deter successful milestones and positive outcomes for this population of students to date due to COVID-19, and there has been no study considering the current perceptions of unmet needs among this population.

Purpose of the Study

This IPA aimed to explore BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19. By exploring the lived experiences of this population of distance learners, this study identifies emerging personal and group experiential themes (GETs) and aimed to anticipate the factors contributing to poor academic achievement. Furthermore, this study adds to the existing literature on individual motivation by analyzing BOCS's contribution

to motivation via Maslow's hierarchy using BET while considering the motivational impact surrounding the composite persistence model. These contributions are viewable via the analysis and interpretation of BOCS' resilience motivations, despite needs being unmet, that invoked the assurance of academic achievement during COVID19.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study was: What are BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19?

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I explored the perceptions of unmet needs of BOCS during COVID-19 and the impact of these unmet needs on academic persistence and overall well-being. The conceptual framework drew upon Rovai's composite persistence model and Maslow's hierarchy of needs to offer a comprehensive comprehension of the influences shaping the academic persistence of BOCS.

Rovai's composite persistence model underscores the significance of personal, social, and institutional elements in molding student persistence in higher education. The model posits that academic persistence is a blend of individual and contextual factors encompassing background attributes, academic and social integration, and environmental backing. The perceptions of unmet needs emerged as a contextual element that could potentially impact academic persistence. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was used to consider the facets of BET to fathom the distinct perceptions of unmet needs experienced by BOCS during COVID-19. The requirement for belonging nurtures a sense of affiliation and acceptance within a collective. Esteem needs encapsulate the yearning for

recognition, esteem, and self-regard. Transcendence needs entail the quest for meaning and purpose beyond oneself. In the study, I sought to unravel specific experiences linked to student persistence, delving into BOCS' perceptions of unmet needs during COVID-19 through the dual prism of these theories. By grasping the particular unmet needs, feasible interventions and support structures could be instituted to address these needs and ultimately enhance academic persistence.

This conceptual framework was used to delve into the qualitative dimensions of comprehending how the perceptions of unmet needs, aligned with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, might potentially influence the academic persistence of BOCS amid the exigencies posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Maslow (1971, p. 195) contended that a humanistic educational approach could cultivate individuals who are "stronger, healthier, and who would take their lives into their hands to a greater extent" (as cited in Mcleod, 2023). The study held the potential to shape institutional policies and practices that catered to the requirements of BOCS, fostering their persistence in higher education.

Nature of the Study

To address the research question of BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19 within this qualitative study, utilizing IPA (Smith & Nizza, 2022) allowed for genuine inquiry from participants to gather how their perceptions have been shaped through the context of their social, cultural, and multifaceted realities. IPA is a qualitative research methodology that involves analyzing participants' personal experiences to gain a deeper understanding of their subjective reality. The data collection

process in IPA involves conducting in-depth semistructured interviews with participants to capture their lived experiences.

Researchers use open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their personal perspectives, feelings, and beliefs. After collecting data, the analysis process involves transcribing and reading through the interview transcripts and exploratory notes several times to gain a sense of the participants' experiences. Experiential statements can be formulated from the initial impressions, observations, and insights. Next, I engaged in a process reflecting on their narratives and lived experiences from their reflective statements. By finding connections and clustering experiential statements, I was able to determine themes that identified broader patterns among the data. Finally, a table of the personal experiential themes (PETs) and grouped experiential themes was generated from the participants' statements. Applying cross cases analysis and comparing and contrasting themes allowed for the results to be illustrated and written up. Overall, the IPA methodology emphasizes the importance of understanding individuals' subjective experiences and can be used to produce rich, detailed accounts of these experiences through a rigorous process of data collection and analysis.

Definitions

The following terms are intended to help the audience understand the context by which these terms are intended throughout this study.

Academic outcomes: Students' academic achievement level can be measured by assessments like quizzes, tests, attendance and participation, and final examinations (IGI Global, n.d.).

Attrition: The gradual weakening of resistance, especially as a result of continuous pressure or harassment. (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, n.d.).

Black students: Black students can be racially classified as Black, Black Americans, African Americans, Afro-Caribbean, or Afro-Latino/a (National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.)

Black online college students (BOCS): Online college students who racially identify as being of Black descent according to the definition of Black people listed within this study.

COVID-19: A respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus first identified in Wuhan China in 2019 (World Health Organization, 2020).

Demographic profile: The description of a particular type of customer, including their gender, age, and income (Cambridge University Press, n.d.)

Equifinality: Observing how a person's early developmental experiences can lead to similar outcomes (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996).

Family units: One or more adults and children (if any) related by blood, marriage, adoption, and living in the same household (Harper Collins Publisher, n.d.).

Hispanic-serving institution (HSI): An institution that has an enrollment of fulltime equivalent at least 25% Hispanic students at the end of an award year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Historically Black college/university (HBCU): A college or university originally founded before 1964 to educate students who are Black or of African American descent (Merriam Webster, n.d.).

Low income: An individual whose family income is at or below 150% of the poverty line (U.S. Department of Transportation, n.d.).

Motivation: The dynamic internal force that impels human behavior in a particular direction (Stroebe, 2004).

Nonresponse bias: The effect of not responding to a survey or poll, also identified as skewed survey results due to a lack of question completion or responses from participants within a given or needed population for the purposes of the study. The nonresponding sampling units that are different from the responding units on the survey measures of interest, correlated to the survey topics (nonresponse bias, 2018).

Online learning platform: An electronic learning platform integrated with online services that grant trainers, learners, and others in education with tools, information, and resources to support and enhance the educational delivery system (Perry, 2023).

Persistence: Firm continuation in one's course of action despite opposition (Merriam Webster, n.d.).

Predominantly White institution (PWI): An institution of higher learning where White students account for 50% or more of student enrollment (Lomotey, 2010).

Retention: The ability to keep workers, customers, or students from leaving (Macmillian Dictionary, n.d.).

Socioeconomic status (SES): The social standing or class of an individual or group measured by a combination of education, income, and occupation (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Systemic obstacles: Barriers, policies, practices, or procedures that result in some people getting unequal access or being excluded (Miller & Garran, 2019).

Assumptions

The assumptions in this qualitative dissertation included beliefs that could not be demonstrated to be true but were critical to the meaningfulness of this study. These assumptions include the belief that BOCS had unmet needs during COVID-19 and that identifying and addressing these needs could lead to societal advancement and improvement within the human and social conditions of this population. The assumption was also made that continued education and intentional efforts of diversity and inclusion could address the negative impact of compounding challenges faced by BOCS. Another assumption was that identifying and addressing the unmet needs of BOCS would improve their academic achievement and overall well-being. Lastly, the assumption was made that the identification of unmet needs could lead to the improvement of efforts among student/teacher engagement when unmet needs were identified or observed.

College students, in general, have not been identified as a priority for health initiatives based on assumptions of privilege due to the idea that this population is reasonably healthy and resource rich (Lederer et al., 2020). This study was focused on the unique experiences of BOCS during COVID-19 who were attending online courses fulltime, which was an area that existing literature has not explored in depth. There is a lack of research addressing the unique contributions toward the unmet needs of BOCS, and there is a need to recognize and refer students to means of support. The assumptions were necessary in this study's context to provide a framework for understanding the research problem, setting research objectives, and interpreting the research findings.

Scope and Delimitations

The research problem addressed in this study was the lack of research on the experiences of BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, I focused on BOCS who attended online courses full-time and aimed to explore their unique experiences and identify their unmet needs. While current literature on the unmet needs of Black college students in the online learning environment primarily focused on graduate students, those studies were separated by gender and only addressed certain aspects such as supportive relationships, resources, engagement, cultural relevance, and career development. However, this study's claim was that BET are highly valued motivational factors among this population of learners. Additionally, current literature has recognized the support, financial, institutional, and mental needs of students transitioning to the online learning platform due to COVID-19.

This study was chosen to address the gap in literature on the experiences of BOCS during COVID-19 who attended online courses 100% of the time and participants were not limited to graduate students. This was crucial as BOCS faced unique challenges and barriers to success in higher education due to their needs being unmet. The study aimed to provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by this population and to identify potential solutions to support their success throughout their online learning experience. The findings of this research could also contribute to the broader conversation on equity and access in higher education, particularly considering the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the phenomenological framework, I gathered individual narratives of lived experiences but applied special attention to removing preconceived biases. Within this framework, I was provided with an analytical perspective of the entire picture as opposed to only a few aspects of mental health among the population within this study. Because I sought to explore the predictive factors, understanding the internal and external systematic relationships was purposeful for gathering the applicable results.

The potential transferability of this study is the ability to apply its findings and recommendations to other institutions of higher education, particularly those with a significant population of BOCS who have yet to reach the graduate level of their studies. By identifying the unique experiences and unmet needs of this population, I aimed to provide insights into the challenges they face and possible solutions to address those challenges. Furthermore, the study's focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on BOCS' experiences and unmet needs provides valuable information for institutions of higher education that may encounter similar unmet needs of various populations and demographics in the future. As the pandemic continues to affect higher education, the study's findings could contribute to the broader conversation on equity and access in online learning and help inform policies and practices aimed at supporting students' success. Overall, this study promoted the potential to inform and benefit institutions of higher education, policymakers, and other researchers interested in equity and access in online learning, particularly for Black students.

Limitations

There were several limitations encountered in this study: managing biases, response consistency, data collection, and data analysis being the most significant. The first potential limitation was managing biases, which occurs at both the participant and researcher levels. To address this limitation, employing a semistructured open-ended interview approach was beneficial for data collection. This method demonstrates the potential to enhance uniformity among participants. As per Magaldi and Berler (2020), the conceptual framework of this study aimed to explore the qualitative aspects of how the perceptions of unmet needs, rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, would influence the academic persistence of BOCS amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, as a novice researcher, I remained aware of potential biases and took steps to mitigate them, such as having a peer review of the research. The second limitation was response consistency, which poses challenges during data analysis. The solution to this was to use data analysis software to help manage and code the data, reducing errors and improving consistency. The third potential limitation was data collection. Because face-to-face semistructured open-ended interviews are the preferred method of the IPA model, minimizing distractions during interviews was essential to ensure high-quality data collection. Finally, there was a limitation with the analysis and interpretation of the participants' experiences, which could be subjective in qualitative research. To mitigate this limitation, following the IPA model is instrumental in gaining robust interpretations and rigorous outcomes (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

In summary, while there were numerous potential limitations to this study, there were reasonable measures taken to minimize or eliminate them. By being aware of potential biases, utilizing semistructured open-ended interviews, using data analysis software, minimizing distractions during data collection, and following the IPA model, the study could be conducted with rigor and provide valuable insights into the experiences of BOCS during COVID-19.

Significance

This study was significant in that it was conducted to address several gaps in the current literature contributing to a broader academic landscape of knowledge. I sought to expand the knowledge of BOCS' experiences, add relevance in the real-world concerns of pandemic-related adjustments, and drive advancement of knowledge through scientific progress. There is inadequate representation of Black college students in the existing literature. In addition, there is limited knowledge of Black college students' experiences with online learning that acknowledges unmet needs (Lederer et al., 2020). Lastly, the focus of online learning during COVID-19 has only been observed in relation to first-year college students (Fruehwirth et al., 2021).

By exploring the experiences of BOCS who attended online courses full-time, this study contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field. The findings of this study will provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and unmet needs faced by this population, which can inform future research and policy. Moreover, this study promotes the potential to advance practice by identifying potential solutions to support the success of BOCS. This study can help institutions improve their support services and

resources for this population, ultimately leading to better outcomes and increased retention rates.

In terms of potential implications for positive social change, this study aligns with the broader conversation on equity and access in higher education. By addressing the unique experiences and challenges faced by BOCS during COVID-19, this study contributes to the development of more inclusive and equitable higher education practices and policies, thus, ultimately leading to improved opportunities and outcomes for Black college students in higher education.

Summary

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about substantial disruptions to the higher education system, yet there remains a dearth of extensive research regarding the perceptions of experiences with unmet need of BOCS during this period. In this qualitative IPA, I aimed to explore BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19, using Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs and the composite persistence model to understand factors that influence their academic persistence and overall wellbeing. The study's purpose was to identify emerging experiential themes that contribute to poor academic achievement, such as deprivation and additional disparities that go unnoticed and unaddressed. The research question was: What are BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19? The study sought to expand current literature to include BOCS's experiences during COVID-19. Ultimately, the study promotes an opportunity to inform institutional policies and practices that support the needs of BOCS and endorse their persistence in higher education.

Chapter 2 of this study will be a comprehensive review of literature relating to experiences, perceptions, needs, and social determinants of health (SDoH) of college students—online, hybrid, face-to-face, or other—during COVID-19, confirming the gap with previous and current literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Black college students encounter difficulties in achieving academic success when their unmet needs are not addressed. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the challenges faced by online learners in this population, hampering their motivation. This qualitative IPA aimed to explore the lived experiences of BOCS and their perceptions of unmet needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. By acknowledging and responding to these identified needs, relevant resources could be provided to support these students.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the experiences of Black college students in online learning has been substantial, resulting in unmet needs that have not been adequately addressed. In previous articles, researchers have extensively examined the issue of students' experiences during COVID-19 and highlighted various challenges faced by Black college students. However, there is a lack of literature specifically exploring the perceptions of unmet needs among Black online students before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing individuals' perceptions, experiences, and needs, this study considered both internal and external factors. These factors encompassed individual and institutional effectiveness, as well as insights from Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Rovai's composite persistence model. Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides valuable insights into different levels of human needs, ranging from basic physiological requirements to higher-order needs like self-fulfillment and self-actualization. By considering this framework, the persistence and

desires that drive individuals' motivations and shape their perceptions of their experiences are explored. Rovai's composite persistence model offered an additional layer of understanding, which considers various aspects that contribute to individual resilience and persistence in the face of challenges. The model encompasses factors such as personal attributes, coping mechanisms, and social support systems, all of which significantly influence individuals' perceptions and responses to their environments.

By combining these two frameworks of Maslow and Rovai, a more holistic perspective is gained on the intricate interplay between internal factors (such as personal motivations, values, and emotions) and external factors (such as societal norms, organizational structures, and support networks). This comprehensive approach enables a profound understanding of individuals' perceptions, experiences, and needs, ultimately enhancing comprehension of their behaviors and decision-making processes. While numerous articles have explored the experiences of Black online students during COVID19, focusing on general themes such as access, basic online learning challenges, and the overall impact of the pandemic, researchers have not specifically examined the perceptions of unmet needs among these students (Fountaine & McKnight, 2021; Gut & Smith, 2021; Harper & Franklin, 2020; Hilliard & Harris, 2020; Hypolite, 2020; Jackson, 2021; Johnson & Wilson, 2019; Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2020).

In 2019, Strayhorn conducted a study on Black college students, but the study did not address the students' perceptions of their needs. Instead, Strayhorn's research primarily focused on analyzing financial assistance and additional resources available to meet the known and assumed needs of this population based on historical research.

Although the study acknowledged the provision of financial support and extra resources for Black college students, the researcher did not delve into how the students themselves perceive their own needs and how these perceptions influence their experiences and responses to the challenges they encountered.

Recent literature has examined the unmet needs of BOCS, shedding light on various aspects, including community, support, cultural relevance, engagement, and persistence (Boyd & Choi, 2021; Bradley & McBride, 2020; Hillard & Harris, 2020; Howard & Branch, 2020; Jones & Watkins, 2020). Several common themes and challenges emerged, underscoring the importance of addressing these needs to promote equitable and effective learning experiences for Black students completing online education. The significance of community and support for BOCS has been emphasized, as they often experience feelings of isolation and disconnection in virtual settings, highlighting the need for a supportive and inclusive virtual community. Culturally relevant content and teaching methods have also been crucial, as Black students seek diverse perspectives and culturally sensitive materials in online courses, which could positively impact their engagement and academic success.

Multiple articles have underscored the urgent need to address the unmet needs of Black college students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Providing support for technology access, mental health resources, and financial assistance and adopting a more intersectional approach to support could have contributed to students' success in their online learning experiences. Current literature identified barriers that hinder Black students' persistence in online education, such as financial constraints, limited access to

resources, and a lack of career development opportunities. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving retention rates (Bailey & Griffin, 2021; Flowers & Marsh, 2020; Flowers & Henry, 2021; Harper & Franklin, 2020; Maramba & Burnett, 2021; Palmer et al., 2020). Furthermore, implementing culturally responsive teaching practices promotes the potential to bridge the achievement gap for Black students in online learning platforms, creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment that successfully caters to their diverse needs.

To gain a comprehensive understanding, future research should incorporate the perspectives of the students themselves. This approach would involve exploring how students perceive their needs, the factors shaping those perceptions, and the alignment between provided resources and their actual requirements and expectations. By adopting this approach, deeper insights could be gathered about the experiences and unique challenges faced by Black college students during times of crisis, thus facilitating the development of more effective and targeted support systems.

Importance of Perception

Perception is important for several reasons: understanding the world, decision making, problem solving, communication, personal growth, self-awareness, and adaptation and survival. Perception allows people to make sense of the information they receive from their senses, such as sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Perceptions help people interpret and organize sensory data into meaningful experiences, enabling them to understand the world around them. Perception influences decision-making processes and provides valuable information about the environment, including potential dangers,

opportunities, and social cues. By accurately perceiving surroundings, individuals make informed decisions that enhance well-being and safety. Perception likewise plays a crucial role in problem solving, allowing people to analyze and interpret complex situations, identify patterns, and recognize relationships among different elements. Effective perception enables individuals to develop creative solutions and make connections that might not be immediately apparent.

Perception is essential for effective communication and helps to understand and interpret verbal and nonverbal cues from others, such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. By perceiving these cues accurately, people can better understand others' intentions, emotions, and messages, leading to improved interpersonal relationships and effective communication. Perception contributes to self-awareness and personal growth. By being aware of perceptions, biases, and cognitive processes, individuals gain insights into their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This self-awareness allows for the development of a more accurate understanding of the self and for positive changes to be made in life. Perception is crucial for adaptation and survival and helps to detect and respond to potential threats in the environment, such as predators, dangers, or hazardous situations. Accurate perception allows for quick assessment of situations, appropriate decision making, and actions that promote well-being and safety.

Overall, perception is important because it shapes the understanding of the world, influences decision making, helps solve problems, facilitates effective communication, promotes personal growth and self-awareness, and supports adaptation and survival in

various environments. Perception provides valuable insights into the subjective experiences, cultural influences, barriers, and opportunities specific to BOCS during COVID-19. Understanding the perception of this population of BOCS is crucial for developing effective strategies to address their unmet needs, promote equity, and enhance their overall educational experience during this challenging time.

Assumed Perceptions of Unmet Needs

Several studies have highlighted some common challenges and unmet needs that BOCS may have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as access to technology, financial constraints, academic support, mental health and well-being, social engagement, sense of belonging, and racial and cultural considerations. Many BOCS may have encountered difficulties accessing reliable technology devices, internet connectivity, or other essential tools for remote learning. This digital divide could hinder these students' ability to fully participate in online classes and complete assignments. Financial challenges are often a concern for Black students in general, and the pandemic may have exacerbated these difficulties. Loss of employment, reduced family income, or even increased financial responsibilities could have affected BOCS' ability to afford tuition fees, purchase required textbooks, or secure a conducive learning environment within their home. BOCS may have also faced a lack of personalized academic support and resources. Limited interaction with instructors, reduced access to tutoring services, and difficulty in forming study groups or engaging in collaborative learning may have hindered their academic progress during this global pandemic. The pandemic's impact on mental health has become significant, and BOCS may have experienced increasingly

heightened levels of stress, anxiety, or feelings of isolation. The lack of in-person social connections, reduced access to counseling services, and the challenges of balancing academic and personal responsibilities could have contributed to these issues. Online learning environments can sometimes feel impersonal, leading to a diminished sense of social engagement and belonging. BOCS may have lacked the social connections, networking opportunities, and cultural events they would have experienced in a traditional on-campus setting. BOCS may have faced additional challenges related to racial and cultural dynamics. These could include feelings of discrimination, limited representation of Black perspectives in course materials, or a lack of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in online learning platforms.

The experiences and perceptions of BOCS can vary significantly based on individual circumstances, geographic location, institutional support, and other factors. Conducting up-to-date research or referring to recent studies could provide a more accurate understanding of the current perceptions and unmet needs of this specific population during COVID-19. In this chapter, I review existing literature to examine how the pandemic affected BOCS' experiences, perceptions, and needs. This study was necessary because of the compounding challenges that Black students continually face, such as limited access to education, jobs, health care, and mental health care providers who can relate to their experiences.

Current literature that has explored the unmet needs of BOCS reveals several common themes and challenges faced in online learning environments, such as

community support, cultural relevance, meaningful interactions, engagement strategies, barriers to persistence, culturally responsive teaching practices, and lived experiences. The studies acknowledge the importance of a sense of community and support for BOCS. These students often experience feelings of isolation and disconnectedness in virtual settings. Building a supportive and inclusive virtual community is crucial to address needs for belonging and enhancing their overall experience (Ellis et al., 2019). Black students often seek culturally relevant content and teaching methods in online courses. Integrating diverse perspectives and incorporating culturally sensitive materials could positively impact student engagement and academic success (Blackmon & Davis, 2019). Meaningful interactions with faculty play a pivotal role in students' academic experiences. Black students potentially benefit from personalized support, mentorship, and guidance from faculty members, which would help address their unique needs and challenges (Gut & Smith, 2021).

To ensure the success of BOCS, the implementation of various engagement strategies is essential. Engagement strategies include interactive learning activities, online discussions, and group projects to foster engagement and active participation (Williams et al., 2017). Articles have highlighted several barriers that impede Black students' persistence in online education. These barriers include financial constraints, limited access to resources, and lack of career development opportunities. Addressing these barriers is crucial to improve retention rates (Davison & Richmond, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching practices can help bridge the achievement gap for Black students in online learning environments. Creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment is

essential for meeting these students' diverse needs (Ellis et al., 2019). Understanding the lived experiences of BOCS is vital for developing effective interventions and support systems. Because their experiences differ from traditional students, tailored approaches are needed to address their specific challenges (Davison & Richmond, 2018).

In conclusion, this literature emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive, inclusive, and culturally relevant online learning environment for Black college students. Addressing these students' unmet needs could lead to increased engagement, persistence, and academic success in online education. Educators, institutions, and policymakers should consider implementing strategies that prioritize the unique needs of BOCS. Doing so would promote equitable and effective learning experiences.

Literature Search Strategy

Relevant literature and recent studies were identified through a comprehensive search across various search engines, aided by the expertise of Walden University librarians. The search focused on the Walden University Library database, using a date range spanning from 2002 to 2022. This approach aimed to uncover potential shifts and recurring trends during the two decades preceding the COVID-19 pandemic. From there, the search was expanded utilizing Academic Search Complete, APA Psych Articles, APA PsycInfo, Business Source Complete, CINAHL Plus with Full Text, EBSCO eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Education Source, ERIC, MEDLINE with Full Text, ProQuest Central, and Google Scholar. In cases where I come across a scenario characterized by scarce contemporary research and minimal dissertations or conference proceedings, I would extend my exploration beyond conventional academic resources. This involved

broadening my search to encompass industry reports, government publications, and specialized websites as alternative avenues for valuable information. I also considered adjusting my research question to build upon established knowledge and align it with the present circumstances. Another viable approach involved initiating an exploratory phase through interviews or surveys, enabling the collection of firsthand insights. Collaborating with subject matter experts for guidance would be an additional avenue worth exploring. Lastly, I would ensure proper justification for any existing research gaps. By articulating the discovered gap, I will be able to show why my study was of utmost importance. Keywords and phrases were combined within these search engines to locate related literature. Keywords used included *Black college students, Black students, university students, undergraduates, challenges, online learning, e-learning, distance learning, online students, COVID-19, perceptions, and unmet needs.*

Conceptual Framework

Psychologist Abraham Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs framework that built upon his prior investigations into motivation and behaviors. His research delved into various facets of motivation experiences. In 1970, Maslow introduced a hierarchy encompassing physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs, which he later expanded to encompass cognition, aesthetics, and transcendence. This study examined Maslow's broader perceptions of unfulfilled needs during the COVID-19 period, particularly emphasizing BET within the latest iteration of this expanded model.

Maslow

Within Maslow's hierarchy, for BOCS, the needs of BET may significantly be the most impactful external motivators when seeking to understand their perception of unmet needs when pursuing a minimal resistance to academic achievement. Theorist Clayton Alderfer categorized Maslow's original hierarchy of needs into three categories, existence, relatedness, and growth, proposing the order of importance of these categories is different for everyone; therefore, placing them in categories is important because focusing on only one need at a time will not bring about effective motivation (Alderfer, 1969). Observing BOCS through the lens of the external motivators of BET, the challenges of COVID-19 can be better understood.

Belonging, Esteem, and Transcendence***Belonging***

Belonging, identified as a need for purpose, is the quest for an overarching aspiration that energizes one's efforts and provides a central source of meaning and significance in one's life (Bird & Lindsey, 2020). If the success of BOCS is measured by student attrition as it relates to BET, one could explore Strayhorn's (2019) model of college student's sense of belonging theory. Strayhorn's theory appropriately addresses BET. It increases motivation through relationship building needed to improve the individual's behaviors that influence others through belongingness, status, reputation, and responsibility via esteem and helping others reach the goal of self-actualization through transcendence (Strayhorn, 2019). Conclusively, Strayhorn (2019) noted that belonging is the key to educational success for all students.

According to Ooi et al. (2022), belongingness is categorized by individuals who do not feel connected or are a part of any social circle, be it family, friends, or other groups. Maslow suggested that the need for belonging greatly evolves once the physiological and safety needs are met (Strayhorn, 2019). Korpershoek et al. (2019) conducted a study exploring the relationship among belonging, motivation, socialemotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes while in secondary education and discovered that belonging played a critical role in these factors. Korpershoek et al. concluded that this need for belonging was a higher-level need among those with lower SES (2019). According to Strayhorn (2019), a sense of belonging involves core elements of human needs that are drivers of behavior at different levels of importance in that it: consequently matters, affects college students, establishes additional positive outcomes, and applies continual satisfaction but could change circumstantially. Black students are frequently marginalized on their college campuses, according to a mixed-methods study by Thelamour et al. (2019), which examined the relationship between racial identity and campus connectedness. First-year college students expressed their sense of belonging during COVID-19 through three straightforward yet complex themes: navigating uncertainty, seeking face-to-face connections, and developing resilience (Potts, 2021). A study by Al Awaji et al. (2022) measured self-esteem and communication anxiety during COVID-19, reporting mixed results for academic performance.

Esteem

Students reported academic pressures and heightened stress levels brought about low self-esteem, impacting their concentration and academic performance (Chandra,

2020). According to Maslow (1970), Esteem in his educational model is fostered by achievement, status, responsibility, reputation, and ultimately acceptance. Esteem within the classroom is visible through assessments, real-time feedback, and course preparation which improves the experience and satisfaction of the online learner (Zhang et al., 2022). Ooi et al. (2022) reported that for esteem to be met, belongingness must first be met. Esteem is identified as an asset that enhances belongingness (Perry & Lavins-Merillat, 2019). Changes in esteem are suggested to promote academic success at a higher-order level, according to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy. Ooi et al. (2022) noted that university students have much higher needs for belonging and esteem than younger students. Self-esteem, coupled with self-efficacy and grit, collectively and individually contribute to academic success (Neroni et al., 2022). When identifying caregivers and other support systems, esteem was a top challenge brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (Atilas et al., 2021). Though no differences were revealed, the Rosenberg self-esteem scale and subjective happiness scale were used to identify if self-esteem correlated with happiness between genders among college graduates (Sharma & Venkatesan, 2021).

Transcendence

By means of transcendence, an individual encounters a sensation of being linked to something beyond their own self (Reischer et al., 2020). Huang, Li, and Hsu (2022) observed a cohort of 254 Black college students from an HBCU and found that fostering social connectedness contributed to favorable emotional well-being and a sense of agency amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Transcendence within the community is described as social justice, alliances, generational skills, and cultural transmission, which includes

needs beyond each person, notes Bird and Lindsey (2020). Belongingness and esteem hold significant positions in Maslow and Herzberg's (1970) theory of motivation. Nevertheless, while these theories emphasize higher-level needs, transcendence is not explicitly identified as a motivating factor within them. Transcendence is the highest level of human consciousness, according to Maslow (1969b), behaving and relating to oneself, to significant others, and to human beings in general. Similar to Maslow's perspective, these theorists have distinguished it into both an interpersonal and a collective dimension (Llanos & Martínez-Verduzco, 2022). Maslow (1969b) explored the concept of transcendence, which originates from the self and extends to encompass others. This can be succinctly described as the pursuit of one's utmost potential and showing others how to do the same. This notion builds upon the connectivity dynamics inherent in his theory.

Composite Persistence Model

The composite persistence model, a theory by Alfred Rovai, describes students' characteristics and skills before college admission and internal and external factors that impact students after admission. This theory considers Vincent Tinto's institutional departure model and John Bean and Barbara Metzner's nontraditional attrition model and expanded it to include the online experience (Rovai, 2003). Rovai explored skills necessary for engagement in the online learning environment (2003). Tinto, Bean, and Metzner go on to include demographics, previous educational experiences, motivation, an increase in current responsibilities outside of school, campus support, and students' access to resources as contributing factors impacting persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Rovai,

2003; Tinto, 1993, as cited in Rovai, 2003). The three needs of BET, as outlined by Maslow, combined with the composite persistence model of Rovai, assist in exploring the perception of the unmet needs of BOCS during COVID-19. Students' persistence factors exist in many theories, but none include examining how marginalized experiences impact the Black community (Berry, 2021).

Black college students have heightened perceptions of burdensomeness due to subtle and radical experiences of discrimination impacting their sense of value, worth, and social connection (Holland & Zimmerman, 2022). Students from low SES often have higher rates of overall unmet needs; nevertheless, when their mental health has been adequately addressed, disparities have been noted to dissipate (Reppond, 2019). From the self-determination theory of motivation, extrinsic motivation imposes rewards and punishment as drivers of motivation for college students (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Hamilton and Dehart (2019) suggested that unmet belonging needs motivate students to regulate perceptions driven by external factors like peer approval. Having high amounts of social connection is associated with having lowered levels of depression among college students, according to Barbour et al. (2021).

Of Maslow's expanded hierarchy of needs, BET may not be identified as drivers of success for the population of BOCS because resilience historically has proven that the Black community can prevail in the face of adversity. Using the theories of Maslow and Rovai, this study aims at observing the interconnectedness of how motivation impacts BOCS' perception of their unmet needs during COVID-19. Broadly defined, resilience can be viewed as a positive response to diversity (Bryant et al., 2022). Allostasis is the

long-term cost of how the body responds to stress (Oxford dictionary, n.d.). Black Americans who find themselves in high-risk stress filled environments may be adversely affected by their process of resilience (Bryant et al., 2022). The skin-deep resilience pattern suggests that, for low-SES African American youths, maintaining high selfcontrol and persisting with efforts to succeed may act as a double-edged sword, facilitating academic success and adjustment while undermining physical health (Brody et al., 2020). Success and satisfaction do not have to only count at graduation; they can be viewed as meeting many milestones. For Blacks attending PWIs, academic performance determines success and satisfaction (Campbell et al., 2019).

The global perception within the Black community is that their resilience propels them beyond fulfilling basic human needs, like BET, in order to attain academic excellence. Yet, there is a consideration: at what cost? While physiological, safety, cognitive, aesthetic, and self-actualization elements might not align with the desired standards for individuals accustomed to a privileged lifestyle, the existing level of provision seems adequate for achieving satisfactory outcomes.

To delve into the unaddressed needs of Black individuals from communities of color (BOCS) using Maslow's adapted hierarchy of needs, this study aims to uncover the main disparities this group faced in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, their fundamental needs are transformed into survival requirements to achieve holistic wellbeing. Given the scarcity of research detailing the challenges encountered by BOCS, due to limited understanding of these needs, this study intends to examine BOCS' perceptions of these unmet needs. Ultimately, this research strives to pave the way for

future studies that allocate resources to address these identified needs, with the overarching goal of fostering better support and solutions for BOCS.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Factors That Impact Experiences

The outcome of experiencing academic achievement is the motivating goal of all college students. Spencer and Temple (2021) identified individual factors of gender, race, age, performance level (grade point average driven), prior experience, and perceptions of course format as predictors and contributors to academic outcomes among online college students. They go on to list the course factors of participation, course structure, and the instructor as factors that influence academic success; BOCS successful academic outcomes are impacted by a variety of factors such as the type of institution, whether they are first-year or subsequent-year students if they are first-generation college students if they have had prior online learning experiences and even their self-efficacy. When considering the type of institution, PWI suggest open enrollment to all races and ethnicities; their inclusion efforts reach their White students above any other race (Hypolite, 2020). Institutional inclusion efforts observed at PWIs, HSIs, and HBCUs also contribute to the growing imposter phenomenon experienced by Black students, leading to the adoption of John Henryism coping mechanisms that affect their psychological well-being (Bernard et al., 2020; Merritt et al., 2011). These effects extend beyond inclusive efforts that address Maslow's hierarchy of needs, including BET. Mills (2020) shared in her exploration of Black students' experiences with racial microaggressions while attending PWIs which was guided by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model

of stress and coping. The transactional model of stress and coping reflects stress and its external contribution between a person and their environment (or stimuli) exceeding their response resources. With racial gaps still evident via graduation rates and the known financial and academic challenges, Hypolite (2020) detailed the complexities of social integration as a contributing factor for experiences and perceptions of persistence towards student completion. Mills went on to identify that segregation, lack of representation, campus response to criminality, cultural bias within the courses, tokenism, and pressure to conform within the face-to-face experiences as additional influences that impacted their college experience (2020). Zhang et al. (2022) put forth a proposal based on their observation of learning outcomes and the relationship between heightened social presence feelings and learner attributes. Through this, they aimed to enhance the comprehension of how academic success is influenced.

Whitaker (2022) delved into the perspectives and experiences of Black community college students participating in online learning. The research uncovered unsatisfactory academic results within the California community and underscored the limited understanding of the online college student demographic. Based on the findings, it was inferred that an increased investment in online services was essential, and the establishment of opportunities for online student communities could greatly benefit this specific student group.

Several studies have explored the components that foster positive learning outcomes in online educational settings. Vygotsky (1978) posited that learning goes beyond mere acquisition of new knowledge; it encompasses cognitive functions rooted in

social interactions. These interactions, akin to the concept of BET, create a collaborative sense of community, facilitating a transcendent desire that reaches beyond individual boundaries (Rovai & Gallien, 2005).

For successful outcomes, the online learning experience should include collaborative opportunities with cohort-based groups in the surrounding geographical proximity of each other to blend the traditional format with the online format so informal study groups can also be established (Rovai & Gallien, 2005). Additionally, studies focused on the hindrances and benefits of academic enhancement within the online learning environment found negative themes of lack of social presence, lack of cultural inclusion, and subtle discrimination for creating poor academic experiences and positive themes of prior online experiences and teacher engagement as positive online experiences (Kumi-Yeboah, et al., 2020; Stevens et al., 2018). One study utilized data from a sample size of 69,722 across the United States. Utilizing a college health assessment, they measured the perceived experiences with discrimination using a logistic regression model measuring sociodemographic data. The discrimination was found not to be solely based on off-campus experiences. In exploring the minority-serving institutions, researchers concluded that even compared to PWIs and HBCUs, minority-serving institutions tend to reduce discrimination experiences; however, they do not eliminate them.

When examining the online learning journeys of Black college students across different academic years (such as the first year, subsequent years, etc.), existing literature affirms positive results when previous experiences are relevant. The aim is to comprehensively understand the general perception of Black students regarding their

online education, with a specific focus on discerning potential distinctions between their initial year and the subsequent years (Bhagabah et al., 2016). In student and/or faculty interactions, the challenges noted were listed as integrity, quality, and technical connections, whereas undergraduates and those who did not hold a business major had higher negative perceptions. According to Pews research (2022), 28% of Black adults 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or above, and in October 2021, 41% of Black college students failed to complete it because they could not afford it. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), Black college student enrollment is highest among students ages 18-24 and has increased by 14% since 1976 to 2021 at HBCUs.

Historical and Current Needs

When exploring the common needs of BOCS, it is important first to identify what literature revealed as known needs among this population of students. By reflecting on current needs, a better baseline is available to explore the unknown and unmet needs identified by BOCS. When explored in literature, basic needs typically use Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a foundational approach. Literature suggested that historical and current needs were identified as: insecurities in food, finances, housing, job loss, health, and social support. When examining college students, multiple studies have focused on needs that align with established institutional initiatives and support services. However, a notable issue arises from this approach: these efforts frequently target only recognized needs, leaving the needs of the Black student population inadequately addressed.

A study conducted by Kelliher (2022) explored the experiences of HBCU students with basic needs insecurities. The findings of the study revealed that approximately two-

thirds of HBCU students face these challenges, highlighting the importance of increased institutional support to address these issues. The study also indicated that historical and current needs have not diminished over time but have instead intensified. These needs encompass a range of elements, such as disparities in wealth and income, healthcare access (especially during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic), and the recognition of specific requirements among first-generation college students, which poses as a challenging task (Daugherty, 2020; Sapadin & Hollander, 2022).

Elder (2021) emphasized the significance of motivation and persistence in recognizing needs beyond academic outcomes. This perspective challenges the traditional approach that often prioritizes institutional goals over students' needs. Consistent with Rovai's' composite persistence model, which considers both pre- and post-enrollment factors, the study acknowledges the importance of pre-admission considerations, such as high-school performance, institutional fit (including PWIs, HBCUs, and HSIs), and financial support. These factors play a crucial role in determining college students' persistence in the face of various challenges and influences.

Drawing upon the Health Minds Study, Samlan et al. (2021) identified racial barriers that lead to negative outcomes for Black college students. Their research involved a sample of 1,817 participants between ages 18 and 22, with a comparison to a prior year sample of 4,031. The study revealed that approximately 34% of college students seeking help for mental health concerns utilized the counseling center (Samlan et al., 2021). Additionally, the article explored the reasons why college students experiencing suicidal thoughts may choose not to seek treatment, highlighting factors such as participants'

perception of their needs, the severity of assistance required, perceived benefits, barriers, and reasons for not seeking treatment. The results indicated a preference among participants to independently handle their issues.

In their study, Allen and Alleman (2019) examined the social and academic challenges associated with food insecurities among college students. They specifically observed a decline in social and academic attendance outcomes among students attending private affluent institutions. The study indicated that the existence of a needs gap predates the college-age for first-generation college students. However, their determination to obtain a degree, despite unmet needs, demonstrates their motivation to strive for greater achievements.

What Shapes BOCS' Perceptions?

BOCS considers resilience as a foundational factor that influences motivation. Within this study's population, BET are identified as external motivators promoting persistence toward academic achievement despite their experiences regarding their unmet needs. A goal-promoting perception theory shares the importance of goal planning, striving, and shielding to self-regulate their motivation (Cole & Balcetis, 2021). Wei and Chou (2020) shared that computer and online readiness enhanced student perceptions of course satisfaction and outcomes. Black college students were said to possess higher academic resilience despite any racial campus climate they may have experienced (Mills, 2020); thus, when their perception turned negative, their academic motivation reportedly declined.

In exploring the perception of mental health needs and help-seeking behaviors of college students within minority groups, Lipson et al. (2022) surveyed the data of 350,000 students from 373 campuses across the nation between 2013 and 2021, identifying the ethnic trends and compared those trends with treatment-seeking outcomes. Mental health statuses were explored with well-known health questionnaires, and statistical analysis was provided in conjunction with their data claims. Help-seeking was equally explored with supportive data like that of mental health statuses. Discoveries concluded with little progress and an increase in inequalities, pointing towards additional opportunities for research towards the confirmed gaps. According to Daugherty (2020), 76% of all undergraduates perceived that a lack of motivation was their highest challenge, and amid the pandemic mandates for online learning, lack of social engagement was the second leading issue at 56%; nevertheless, racial and ethnicity differentiations were not included within this survey.

The perception of engagement factors surrounding BET was measured among first-generation and subsequent college students. Their sense of belonging was measured daily and overall, where changes were noted based on daily experiences that impacted their feelings of belongingness—noting high sensitivity impacts on first-generation students compared to continuing-generation students (Gillen-O’Neel, 2021). Furthermore, Gillen-O’Neel noted belonging as a critical factor for maintaining motivation at academic institutions (2021). The limitation of this study was the sample size of Black student representation in a sample size of 13 compared to 267 other races, where 201 were White.

Social Determinants of Health

According to Johnson et al. (2021), when SDoH needs are unmet, it impacts the perception of overall health and well-being for individuals throughout their lifetimes. SDoH impacted college students in their actual and perceived areas of finances, food and housing insecurities, mental health, and overall health (including but not limited to life expectancy; Johnson et al., 2021). Of the 309 students in this study, 18.3% were Black, and of the remaining 81.7%, 55.1% were White (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021). Lederer et al. (2021) sought to find the increasing inequalities that COVID-19 placed on college students of color, especially those with low SES status. The findings confirmed reports from earlier acknowledged literature where experiences of housing and food insecurities, financial hardships, and minimized social connection negatively impacted student outcomes.

Shanta et al. (2018) explored the relationship between social-cognitive factors, psychological distress, and help-seeking actions from 111 international and African American/Black college students from Jackson State University. The study acknowledged that mental health services were underutilized and sought to focus on which factors predicted health-seeking outcomes. As hypothesized, perceived behavioral control was found to be a significant predictor of students' intention to seek mental health services; nevertheless, perceived attitudes did not predict intentions to seek the help of mental health services. Despite lack of actual BOCS engagement or intentional helpseeking efforts, these findings possessed implications for mental health service providers whose outreach mental-health programs aimed at motivating and/or encouraging students to

translate help-seeking intentions into behaviors (e.g., seeking mental health services when they experience psychological distress; Shanta et al., 2018).

Numerous studies have sought to identify if there is a correlation between personal stigma and public stigma. As hypothesized, none were determined (Shanta et al., 2018; Taliaferro et al., 2020; Tran, 2021). With a final sample size of 4,089, with 40% men and 59% women at an average age of 18 or above, the study pulled adequate data from their 2015-2019 cohort years. Of this sample size, 76% identified as White, 25% as Black, and 2% as others. With such an unbalanced sample representing the minority, yet, unlike prior articles, the findings revealed a new observation of White student-athletes holding a higher rate of personal stigma towards the unmet needs surrounding their mental health. This research assessed demographics, academic demands, mental health function, and mental health perceptions as possible barriers to mental health care service utilization. Prior research attempted to identify barriers but has focused more on gender, noting that women have higher rates of seeking help than men. This study pointed toward the growing gap identified regarding the Black community, views on mental health needs, and assumed resources.

Taliaferro et al. (2020) proposed that to meet needs, you must first understand them. According to Taliaferro et al. (2020) major stress contributors were family, perfectionism, and unmet interpersonal challenges for international students. With a sample size of 435, they examined mental health and identified the relationships between risks, protective factors, emotional distress, and suicide. They found that interpersonal unmet needs remained significantly associated with suicidal ideations. The factors with

the highest contributors within the study were emotional distress and suicidal ideation, and the highest factors reported were entrapment—defined as *hopelessness*—and unmet needs.

Impact of COVID-19

With 10% participation of Black students, a study by Katz et al. (2021) explored the learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic noting digital inequality and faculty communication as impactful yet detrimental results for their remote learning proficiency. Utilizing Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Russell et al. (2022) conducted a study reporting that students' well-being, needs satisfaction, and persistence changed due to COVID-19. They identified that during COVID-19, financial well-being and needs satisfaction predicted students' persistence with their college experience. They noted that persistence decreased with the increase in belonging and self-actualization (as defined by Russell et al. as academic achievement) (2022). Institutions raised emergency funds for students who faced housing and food insecurities in the Spring of 2020 when COVID-19 swept the country.

Less than ten years before the COVID-19 pandemic, Flowers et al. (2014) examined the effects of the online learning environment on Black students' perceptions. They noted no major difference between traditional and online learning, which supports the goal and reflection of the equivalency theory (Simonson, 2020). In a nationwide survey by Cerbara et al. (2020), COVID-19 shifted the focus toward health and wellbeing and redirected it toward the emotional and psychological impacts of Maslow's hierarchy

of needs. They concluded that the dominant need during this crisis prioritizes psychological needs above all others.

When exploring Black college students' COVID knowledge, uncertainty and lack of knowledge increased the health threat among the Black community (Huang et al., 2022), where knowledge is effective in perceived control and their threats of uncertainty. African American adults between the ages of 18-24 were said to have the least knowledge about COVID-19 during the early onset stages of the pandemic (Huang et al., 2022). Social distancing restrictions increased feelings of loneliness, added to extensions of isolation for BOCS during COVID-19. Those that shifted to remote instruction due to COVID-19 then experience the isolated challenges that BOCS experienced before the pandemic began. Remote transitions were said to increase the workload academically while decreasing income opportunities creating greater financial strains with stay-at-home orders in place. In a study by Zhang et al. (2022), the perceptions of remote learning experience were improved over time compared to their initial perceptions of learning remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although documented experiences for BOCS are scarce in current literature, the online experiences during COVID-19 for students in Ukraine, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia reported similar experiences. Ukraine reported technology and resource challenges with the abrupt transition to remote learning; nevertheless, the overall experience was satisfactory for teachers and students (Grynyuk et al., 2022). Perspectives by students from the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan revealed challenges like; technology gaps among instructors which led to student dissatisfaction driven by limitations, not

having access to necessary platforms like Blackboard, which required additional licensing, teachers' inexperience with other social platforms, not recording lectures thus asynchronous limitations, available e-learning applications were not user friendly, or simply not having a computer, left the students and teachers ill-equipped for the massive digital shift (Alkabaa, 2022). Among colleges in Saudi Arabia, gender differences revealed higher negativity among females, possibly due to the decreased social connection that the face-to-face experience brought (Alkabaa, 2022). Notably, the research in Saudi Arabia stated that 1.4 million students who transitioned to what they referred to as open distance learning, there was dissatisfaction with student online learning perceptions due to: poor assessment evaluations, poor communications, poor diversity in teaching to various learning styles, poor technology access, and low motivation in course comprehension among the 235 students surveyed (Alkabaa, 2022).

Summary and Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the experiences of Black college students in online learning, leading to unmet needs that have not been adequately addressed. Several articles have explored this issue and highlighted the various challenges that Black college students have faced. In view of current scholarly articles related to the perception of BOCS' unmet needs during COVID-19 they explore the experiences and perceptions of BOCS during COVID-19, and highlight potential unmet needs specifically related to equity, financial resources, and social and emotional support (Bailey & Griffin, 2021; Hillman, 2021; Maramba, & Burnett, 2021; Palmer et al., 2020;

Roberson, 2021). Overall, these articles demonstrate the urgent need to address the unmet needs of Black college students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Providing support for technology access, mental health resources, financial assistance, and a more intersectional approach to support can help these students succeed in their online learning experiences.

This Chapter discussed a qualitative phenomenological study to explore the experiences of BOCS and identify the emerging themes that could help explain why they may experience decreased academic motivation as well as have higher attrition rates. The study focused on the unmet needs and experiences of Black online students before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The conceptual framework for the study was based on psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs model, specifically the needs of BET. The composite persistence model, a theory by Alfred Rovai, was also discussed, which considered internal and external factors that impacted students' persistence within the online learning environment. This chapter emphasizes the need to acknowledge and respond to the identified needs of BOCS to provide applicable resources to support these students, considering the compounding challenges they faced.

In Chapter 3 the research design and rationale will be introduced including the role of the researcher, the methodology, and instrumentation details.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of BOCS regarding their unmet needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, I sought to identify emerging

themes that contribute to poor academic achievement by examining the lived experiences of this population of distance learners. The study also was conducted to analyze the students' contribution to motivation through Maslow's hierarchy of needs, specifically looking at BET. Additionally, I considered the motivational impact surrounding the composite persistence model. The findings of this study will add to the existing literature on individual motivation and will be viewable via the analysis and interpretation of BOCS' resilience motivations, despite unmet needs, that invoke the assurance of their academic achievement during COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the processes of the higher education system, but there has been a lack of research on the experiences of BOCS during this time. This study aimed to fill the gap through a qualitative IPA investigating BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19. Drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the composite persistence model, I sought to understand the factors that influenced BOCS' academic persistence and overall well-being. Specifically, the study was conducted to identify personal and GETs that contribute to poor academic achievement, such as deprivation and additional disparities that went unnoticed and unaddressed.

By exploring the assumptions, scope, limitations, and significance of BOCS' experiences during COVID-19, the study aims to expand current literature on the subject. In essence, the study provides insight into how institutions can better cater to the needs of BOCS and facilitate their ability to persist in their higher education pursuits. The findings from this research can be used to inform policies and practices that better support BOCS and their academic goals. Through this research, I hope to contribute to a better

understanding of the unique challenges BOCS faced during the pandemic as well as help institutions develop strategies to address these challenges.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question was: What are BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19? The study was focused on the phenomenon observing the perceptions of unmet needs among BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their experiences and coping strategies for the challenges of virtual learning and the impact of COVID-19 on their academic, social, and personal lives. Specifically, the study was conducted to gain an understanding in the factors that influence BOCS' academic persistence and well-being, including the deprivation and disparities they encounter.

The research tradition adopted in this study was qualitative IPA. This approach involves exploring and interpreting the lived experiences of participants to understand their perspectives and meanings of a particular phenomenon. IPA was well-suited for this study as it allowed me to gain in-depth insights into the experiences of BOCS during COVID-19 and their perceptions of unmet needs. The phenomenological approach uncovers the essence of participants' experiences and how they made sense of those experiences. The rationale for employing qualitative IPA in this study was its suitability for capturing the rich and nuanced experiences of BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly regarding their perceptions of unmet needs. The research question was used to understand BOCS' perspectives and meanings attached to their experiences, which align well with the interpretive phenomenological approach.

By using qualitative IPA, I dove deep into the lived experiences of BOCS, exploring the essence of their encounters with unmet needs as well as the impact of COVID-19 on their academic, social, and personal lives. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence these students positively and negatively. Furthermore, qualitative IPA provided a framework to uncover the subjective interpretations and meanings that BOCS attribute to their experiences. This study aimed to expound on the ways BOCS made sense of their circumstances, coped with their challenges, and navigated their virtual learning environment. This approach fostered a more holistic understanding of their experiences by highlighting the unique and contextualized perspectives of BOCS.

In summary, the qualitative IPA was chosen as the research tradition for this study because it offers a robust methodology to explore the perceptions, experiences, and meanings attributed by BOCS to their unmet needs during COVID-19. By employing this approach, I gained valuable insights into the challenges faced by BOCS and how they applied strategies to support their academic persistence and overall well-being.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this study, I sought to maintain a neutral and objective stance to ensure the credibility of the research. To do this, I disclosed any potential biases that may have existed and outlined steps taken to manage them. There were several ways in which I ensured the disclosure of any potential biases. First, to ensure the research was conducted ethically and without conflicts of interest, no personal or professional relationships existed with this study's participants, nor were there any supervisory or

instructor relationships involving power over participants. Second, any potential researcher biases were managed by maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process. This involved being aware of my personal biases, assumptions, and values that could have impacted the research and taking steps to minimize their influence. For example, regular self-reflection and discussion with peers helps to identify and address potential biases. I kept a journal of biases, thoughts, and considerations that arose throughout this process.

Third, there could have been potential conflicts of interest when offering incentives for participation in the study. However, because incentives were offered, they were disclosed to participants before their involvement in the study. Finally, the justification for using incentives in this study was to enhance participation rates and ensure that the voices of BOCS were adequately represented; nevertheless, since the participation sample size was relatively small, it was not necessary, but I did want to prepare for any potential needs. To address any potential issues with incentives, I sought to remain appropriate, fair, and non-coercive. This plan included clearly outlining the terms and conditions of the gift card and ensuring the incentive was not tied to specific responses or outcomes to maintain relevance and effectiveness.

In summary, my role as the researcher observer in this study was to maintain objectivity and to minimize all potential biases and/or conflicts of interest. This involved being transparent about my relationships and biases and managing them through reflexivity. In addition, I ensured that any incentives offered were appropriate and noncoercive.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

To ensure the sample accurately represented the population of interest allowed for meaningful analysis of the research question. Inclusion criteria for this study's population of BOCS included students of any gender, undergraduate and graduate levels, who attended online courses 100% of the time before and during COVID-19 and who offered to express perceptions of their unmet needs. The participant selection logic was presented in the format of locating those whose self-identification was Black/African American students, actively enrolled in an online degree program at a college or university in the United States 100% of the time before and during COVID-19. It was useful to consider additional demographic or background information to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the participants, such as age, gender identity, SES status, and academic standing when addressing the factors that could contribute to their academic motivation.

The sampling strategy I used was purposeful sampling. For the establishment of participant selection criteria, my participants were identified through the Walden Student Research Pool, and their eligibility was determined by their responses to a screening questionnaire that assessed their race, enrollment status, and use of online course format. If there became a need for more participants, snowball sampling could have applied. The number of participants and rationale suggests a minimum of 5-6 participants to be recruited until saturation is reached. This sample size is consistent with the idiographic commitment of IPA (Smith & Nizza, 2022) for professional doctorates. Regarding the relationship between saturation and sample size: the sample size was determined by the

point of saturation, which was reached when no new experiential themes or experiences emerged from the data. Regarding the procedures for participant identification, contact, and recruitment, participants were identified through the Walden Student Research Pool, and they were contacted via email with details about the study, including the informed consent form and the contact information of a Walden University representative.

Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis, and they were informed about the risks and benefits of being interviewed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Instrumentation

Data collection instruments and sources were semistructured open-ended interviews as the primary data collection instrument. The source of the instrument was researcher produced as I established the interview questions I wanted to ask the participants. To measure the sufficiency of data collection instruments, semistructured open-ended interviews were sufficient to answer the research questions of the study, as they allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences. Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software was my preferred method via NVivo QDA (Dhakal, 2022). QDA was compatible with my computer system's capabilities and had the ability to code audio for analysis benefits.

For Researcher-Developed Instruments

John Smith's (2022) IPA model emphasized the importance of developing instruments grounded in the lived experiences of the research participants. The model emphasized the importance of developing instruments that are flexible and adaptable to the specific needs and experiences of the participants. To establish content validity for a

semistructured open-ended interview instrument, I conducted a thorough review of the literature and consulted with experts in the field to identify the experiential themes and concepts related to the research question.

To establish the sufficiency of data collection in this research study, I employed a researcher-developed instrument that aligned with the IPA model via a semistructured open-ended interview questionnaire. The instrument was a semistructured open-ended interview with questions utilized to capture information pertinent to the research objectives and research inquiries of this study. There were 13 interview questions designed to delve into the perceptions and experiences of BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic that focused on unmet needs identified in the literature. The questions were designed to explore both known and unknown needs as well as understand students' coping mechanisms and persistence strategies. Focusing on these areas allowed me to tailor the questions to capture the unique aspects of the research topic, providing valuable insights into the research objectives and phenomena under investigation. Throughout the development process, I prioritized the trustworthiness of the instrument, ensuring it accurately measured the intended constructs and yielded consistent and accurate results.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Smith's IPA approach involves collecting rich, detailed qualitative data through semistructured open-ended interviews to understand the perceptions and experiences of participants in a specific context. The data for this study were collected from BOCS who experienced unmet needs during COVID-19. Purposive sampling was utilized to recruit participants from various colleges and universities nationwide. I followed the qualitative

interview recommendations to ensure a suitable approach for this qualitative IPA study. The frequency of data collection events depends on participant availability, with at least one interview per participant recommended. Each interview session was expected to last between 45 minutes and an hour and was audio-recorded with each participant's consent. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, stored securely, and anonymized to protect participant confidentiality. In the event of insufficient participants, recruitment criteria could have been expanded, but it was not needed. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences and received a debriefing session after the interview. A few follow-up interviews were required, and participants had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on their interview transcripts. They were advised to be informed of any significant findings if they wished to receive them.

Data Analysis Plan

Connection of Data to the Research Question

The data collected from the semistructured open-ended interviews was directly relevant to the research question: to explore the perceptions of BOCS' unmet needs during COVID-19. The questions asked during the interviews were open-ended and designed to elicit detailed responses from the participants, who were analyzed to identify themes and patterns related to the research question.

Hermeneutic Analysis

According to Smith and Nizza's IPA model, the steps used in this study was hermeneutic analysis, which involved reading exploratory notes and carefully reading each transcript while making detailed exploratory notes that gain insight on the

impressions and observations from the data. Next, it was necessary to formulate experiential statements reflecting each narrative's lived experiences. I sought connections and applied them based on their experiential statements. Once the connections were identified and the experiential statements were clustered into themes, I could capture broader patterns within the data. The PETs and GETs were explored with individual cases and organized into clusters for cohesion. Comparison of cross-case analysis was conducted, comparing each participant's themes among their experiences. After those steps were completed, I could write up the results, study them, apply illustrative themes, and share findings concerning the current literature regarding this data.

Software Used for Analysis

The software traditionally used for analysis generally depends on the researcher's preference. There were several software options available, including NVivo, Atlas.ti, and MAXQDA, which could assist with the coding and analysis of qualitative data. These software programs facilitate the organization and management of large volumes of data and assist with the identification of experiential statements and themes. I utilized Microsoft Teams for scheduling, recording, and transcribing. I utilized Microsoft Excel to create the tables and figures generated from the data collected.

Manner of Treatment of Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases are cases where the data collected did not fit the emerging patterns or themes identified in the analysis. These cases were carefully examined and analyzed to understand why they did not fit with the overall patterns identified in the data.

I included discrepant cases in the analysis because it provided important insights and new perspectives that contributed to a more nuanced understanding of my research question.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Walden University's document on Trustworthiness outlined several potential issues that could threaten the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These issues included:

Credibility

This refers to the extent to which the findings of the research are credible and believable. It is important to establish credibility by ensuring that the research is conducted in a rigorous and systematic manner, with a clear research design, appropriate data collection methods, and careful analysis of the data. Credibility may be compromised by factors such as researcher bias, leading questions, or inadequate data collection procedures. Potential issues that can impact credibility include selection bias, social desirability bias, interviewer bias, and the lack of member checking. To enhance credibility, researchers can use multiple data sources and methods, triangulate data, use a reflexive journal, and ensure adequate sample size.

Transferability

This refers to the extent to which the findings of the research can be transferred to other contexts or populations. It is important to establish transferability by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, methods, and participants, as well as a clear rationale for the study. Transferability may be limited by factors such as the specificity of the research question, the sampling strategy, or the cultural context of the study. Potential issues that can impact transferability include narrow sampling, a lack of

contextual information, and the overreliance on a single method of data collection. To enhance transferability, researchers should provide a detailed description of the context and participants, use purposive sampling, and provide a detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedures.

Dependability

This refers to the extent to which the research findings are consistent and stable over time. It is important to establish dependability by ensuring that the research is conducted in a consistent and systematic manner, with clear procedures for data collection and analysis. Dependability may be threatened by factors such as changes in the research context, changes in the research team, or changes in the research methods. Potential issues that can impact dependability include changes in the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. To enhance dependability, researchers can use a clear and detailed research design, document any changes in the research design or data collection procedures, and use inter-coder reliability testing.

Confirmability

This refers to the extent to which the research findings are grounded in the data and not influenced by the researcher's biases or perspectives. It is important to establish confirmability by being transparent about the research process and ensuring that the data is analyzed in a systematic and rigorous manner. Confirmability may be affected by factors such as researcher bias, subjectivity in the interpretation of the data, or inadequate documentation of the research methods as well as the lack of transparency in the research process, and the lack of peer review. To enhance confirmability, researchers can use an

audit trail, ensure that data and interpretations are grounded in the data, use a clear and transparent research process, and seek peer review from other researchers.

Ethics

This refers to the ethical considerations involved in the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and protection of human subjects. It is important to ensure that the research is conducted in an ethical manner that protects the rights and well-being of the participants.

In the context of the IPA model, both member checking and inter-coder reliability played important roles in enhancing the dependability and confirmability of the research findings. Through member checking I applied the IPA process by seeking feedback and validation from the participants themselves regarding the interpretation of their experiences or data. In IPA, member checking involved analyzing the experiential themes with the participants and seeking their input or corrections to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings. There was a running transcript that was dictating while we were recording so both myself and each participant were able to see the transcript and had the option of expressing any edits needed. By involving participants in this process, member checking enhanced the dependability and confirmability of the research by allowing participants to verify and validate their own experiences as represented in the analysis. By employing member checking, I involved participants in the analysis process, allowing them to provide insights and corrections to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures for research involving human participants are a critical component of any research study. The following provides an overview of some of the key ethical procedures and considerations that were included within my institutional review board (IRB) application. First, there were institutional permissions, including IRB approvals to consider. I first obtained approval from the IRB before conducting any research involving human participants. The IRB is responsible for ensuring that the study was conducted in an ethical and safe manner, and that the rights and welfare of participants were protected. The IRB application included a detailed description of the study, the risks and benefits to participants, and obtained informed consent. My IRB approval number (04-19-24-1125453) was included in the application. Secondly, any potential ethical concerns related to recruitment I addressed them within my recruitment procedures that were designed to avoid coercion or undue influence, and I provided each participant with all necessary information to make an informed decision about their participation and how to remove themselves from the study at any point should they have deemed it necessary to do so. I addressed these concerns within the IRB application, as well. Each participant was required to provide informed consent before participating in the research study. Informed consent was obtained in writing and included a description of the study, the risks and benefits of participation, and a statement indicating that participation is voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Data collection procedures were designed to protect participant privacy and minimize any risks associated with participation. As the researchers I proposed to

ensure that participant data will be kept confidential and that data storage procedures comply with relevant data protection laws. I considered the need to determine whether the data I collected would be anonymous or confidential and included a plan to protect confidential data, sharing this with the participants. Protection included data storage procedures, data dissemination, and a statement indicating who will have access to the data and when it will be destroyed. Other ethical issues that were addressed in the IRB application included doing a study within my home-work environment, potential conflicts of interest, power differentials, and justification for the use of incentives. All potential ethical issues were addressed in the IRB application.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed a qualitative IPA that aimed to explore the perceptions of unmet needs among BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study purposed to identify emerging themes that contributed to poor academic achievement, drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the Composite Persistence Model to understand the factors that influenced academic persistence and overall well-being. The research design was qualitative IPA, and purposeful sampling was used to initially recruit 8-10 participants until saturation was reached; however, according to the John Smith IPA model, only 5-6 participants are required. Semistructured open-ended interviews were used as the primary data collection instrument, and data analysis involved identifying experiential themes and patterns in the data. The study intends to contribute to the development of institutional policies and practices that support the needs of BOCS during the pandemic.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this IPA was to explore the perceptions of BOCS regarding their unmet needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. With a lens of qualitative exploration of their lived experiences, the study sought to uncover personal experiential and GETs that would shed light on the factors that may contribute to poor academic achievement among this population. Additionally, the research aimed to contribute to existing literature on motivation by examining how BOCS' experiences align with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly focusing on BET, and how these factors interact with the composite persistence model.

The goal was to shed light on the resilience motivations of BOCS despite facing innumerable unmet needs and how these motivations influence their academic success during COVID-19. This study's research question was: What are BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19? This question served as the focal point for this IPA investigation, guiding the exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. The data collection took place online via audio recordings to mirror the digital environment in which BOCS navigated their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The only known impact on the participants was if they experienced connection challenges that caused them to discontinue participating in the study.

Setting

The data collection took place online via audio recordings. This was beneficial in aiding in the opportunity to mirror the digital environment in which BOCS navigated their

experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The only known impact on the participants was if they experienced connection challenges that caused them to discontinue participating in the study. Discontinuing resulted in loss of time and gift cards for lack of completion of the interview according to the study's specific participation requirements.

Demographics

The five participants in this study were BOCS, both female and male genders, encompassing both undergraduate and graduate levels, who exclusively attended online courses before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants self-identified as Black/African American, were actively enrolled in online degree programs at colleges or universities in the United States, and consented to participate in the study. Participants were willing to express their perceptions of unmet needs as online college students. They were recruited through the Walden Student Research Pool and other social media outlets based on their eligibility determined by responses to a screening questionnaire assessing race, enrollment status, course format, and observation of unmet needs. For the semistructured open-ended interview, each participant joined the interviews virtually and was interviewed for 45 minutes.

Data Collection

When applying Smith and Nizza's IPA model, a total number of participants needed was between five and six. For this study, five participants were utilized because saturation of themes was reached. The sampling strategy used was purposeful sampling. The data collection location was established to mirror the same platform and experiences for virtual engagement. These semistructured open-ended interviews were conducted via

the secure platform of Microsoft Teams, allowing for flexibility and safe interactions with each participant, which was most suitable to ensure confidentiality and data security. This method likewise proved most efficient due to the participants' geographical locations and the considered time zones.

The interviews were initially expected to last about 45 minutes; however, they were trending about 20 minutes each. Therefore, to ensure a robust and in-depth analysis, a second interview was offered to those who still needed to make the 45-minute time allowance. The second interview allowed for a more comprehensive overview of the participants' experiences and allowed for probing to reveal more experiences and examples related to the participant's responses.

The real-time interview sessions allowed audio and transcription to be conducted simultaneously. Although there were 13 previously approved interview questions asked of each participant, the printed interview question forms were used to jot thoughts, expressions, and observations in the margins, allowing for supplemental data that aided in further understanding the perceptions of the lived experiences that could not otherwise be captured within the audio recordings. Examples of marginalized notes were when participants paused to consider the question or reflect on a specific event or experience. There was one question that each participant asked to have repeated, so as the reviewing and rereading of the transcripts were being compiled, I noticed that they each struggled with understanding the question. That question was: Do you think your cultural background has influenced the way you experience online learning, especially during COVID-19? In repeating it, I also rephrased it to help them by saying "or your

upbringing.” After the interviews, the audio recordings and transcriptions were saved for each participant’s file. In scheduling them, they were given a random number (111, 143, 145, 425, and 427) and then transposed into numbers P1 through P5 to ease hermeneutic coding and further extend confidentiality. The transcripts’ raw written data were reviewed against the audio data to ensure accuracy. Then, the transcripts were cleaned up to remove the time stamps and participants’ names and identifiers.

The process successfully followed the plan outlined in Chapter 3; nevertheless, a few variations were applied to address unforeseen challenges. The first challenge was scheduling and the need to ensure the time zone was best suited for both myself as the researcher and for the participants. To accommodate this, the invitations sent included that the time suggested is set in my time zone, Central Standard Time; therefore, if the participants did the configuration and deemed they could be available during the dates presented, they moved forward with scheduling. To ensure integrity and validity in the data collection, reverifying the prescreening criteria was added at the start of each interview. This allowed the participant to be reminded of the study’s intent and purpose but also aided in ensuring that I was gathering the lived experiences of participants who met the inclusion criteria of this study. A third challenge was connectivity issues. Some participants experienced poor internet connectivity; therefore, those interviews were discontinued because they impacted the integrity of the responses heard or needed to be interpreted. For those whose interviews were discontinued, I sent a message in the shared secure chat via Microsoft Teams to advise of the discontinuation of the interview for poor connectivity concerns. Likewise, I sent a follow-up email with the same notification. I

recommend that future research participants test their internet connectivity and ensure the connections are stable before proceeding in a research project. Another variation was with the need for a second interview for those participants who answered succinctly and needed to provide more elaboration in the first interview. While the initial interview questions were intended to be more progressive in their alignment, this caused the interviews to go faster than expected because each response led to the next question, causing a bit of hesitation on my behalf to ask what felt like duplicate questions to responses they already provided.

During the data collection process, I encountered several circumstances that required immediate attention but I was prepared based on research done in similar studies. The unusual circumstances included duplicate participation attempts, internet connectivity concerns, environmental distractions, emotional responses and details, supplementary communication, and over 250 responses from the initial invitation. Because a gift card was advertised, my chair and other experts cautioned me to be watchful of individuals who may sign up numerous times to participate. As soon as I felt a participant had already attended, I asked a few specific yet probing questions: Have I already interviewed you for this research? What school do or did you attend? I immediately advised that I was concerned the integrity of my research was being threatened and would have to discontinue the interview and further investigate potential fraudulent participants who may be jeopardizing the validity and integrity of the study. I advised them that no gift card would be given and thanked them for their time thus far.

With the internet connectivity challenges, I immediately tried to regain a clear connection; however, if unsuccessful, I discontinued so the participant could have their time back, and I could move on to the next participant. There were a few environmental distractions like dogs barking, grass being mowed, a plane overhead, and even people chatting in participants' surroundings. For those, I immediately reminded participants to go to a secure place to complete the interview, advising that if they could not, I would have to discontinue the interview. I captured instances of emotional responses by completing the supplemental notes in the margins. Supplemental communication was provided for the applicable candidates who either had to discontinue or pause to address a matter on my end. Considering there were over 240 requests for participation in my study, I was not concerned with discontinuing any for any reason that could jeopardize the integrity of my research.

Every unusual event prompted me to remain flexible and adapt to what was needed to stay ethical and moral in my approach, all while maintaining the credibility of the data collection process. Valuable insights were gathered despite these challenges, and I gained further understanding regarding the experiences and perceptions of unmet needs of BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic. This recording process, albeit meticulous, ensured the outcome of obtaining the thickest, most rich, and most reliable data set while capturing the complex experiences shared by each participant.

Data Analysis

The data were collected through semistructured open-ended interviews and analyzed via Smith and Nizza's IPA approach. Each interview was audio recorded and

transcribed, followed by hermeneutic analysis to identify codes, patterns, themes, and even indifferences within the data. The IPA model requires inductive application coding from more considerable similarities and coding into themes and categories. The steps were to read and re-read the transcripts in-depth, apply initial notations, and comment on observations during each interview, which aided in developing exploratory notes.

Within this initial step, I immersed myself in the transcripts, and by rereading and becoming familiar with each transcript, I was able to identify discoveries that aided in the expansion of my exploratory notes. According to Smith and Nizza (2022), the deep explorations of participants' lived experiences are the primary focus of the IPA design. The group experiential statements' overall experiences were dissected into six categories (community belonging, impact on well-being, self-esteem, motivation, challenges, and needed support) developed by their personal experiential statements.

In Step 2 of this process, personal experiential statements were developed for each participant (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5) to capture their perceptions of their expressed and identified needs. This allowed connections to be drawn across individual themes, ultimately forming the grouped experiential themes. In seeking to identify the motivating factors for BOCS obtaining academic achievement, I was pleased to see that motivation emerged as a unified theme individually and for the group. Each participant had at least one or more impacts on their motivation. P1 shared that their most considerable pressure was external and stated, "I am motivated by work and financial responsibilities." Like P1, P2 expressed that finances were a leading motivation for them, sharing, "I have to consider how much was invested in going to school as well as how much I am afraid not

to make enough money if I do not finish school.” P3 shared a consistent motivation from their familiar support system: “Even though I lacked many resources I needed, my biggest motivation was my family support.” Internal and personal motivation was experienced by P4, who shared, “I am motivated to achieve my goal and complete my degree.” Among all participants, P5 displayed the utmost intrinsic motivation, expressing, “Overall, I felt quite engaged and satisfied with my experience and motivation to further my education.” These individual and PETs collectively entailed the GET of motivation as well as established subgrouped themes like external influences (P1 and P2), support systems (P3 and P5), achievement orientation (P4 and P5), and lastly, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (P1 and P2).

I extracted participants’ expressions about their engagements into exploratory notes. Participants reflected in more depth on their actual areas of struggle. This was expressed in words and phrases used like *loneliness, isolation, lack of resources, financial struggles*, and ultimately just feeling extremely stressed as they detailed their sense of their experiences. These experiences can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Experiential Online Learning Experience

Group experiential theme	Personal experiential theme	Experience (impact on motivation)	Participants
Theme 1: Technological challenges and support needs	Lack of technology	Difficult due to lack of technology	P1, P3
	Technology support needed	Needed more tutoring on technology, Blackboard/Canvas training	P3, P4
Theme 2: Community and isolation	Isolation and lack of community	Felt isolated and robotic; limited sense of community	P1, P2, P3, P4

	Sense of community	Some sense of belonging, did not feel a sense of community; Sense of community through group studies	P1, P2, P5
	Community-building support needed	Support needed for community building	P2, P3, P4
Theme 3: Impact on well-being and self-esteem	Impact on well-being	Stress due to connectivity; Chores-like feeling	P1, P2, P4
	Affected self-esteem	Affected by lack of inperson interactions; Impacted by online learning	P1, P2, P4
Theme 4: Motivation and engagement	Motivation	Motivated by work, financial scare; family support; degree completion	P1, P2, P3, P4
	Engagement	Engaged and satisfied	P5
Theme 5: Challenges and support	Balancing responsibilities	Balancing parenting and work; cultural imbalance	P2, P4
	Support needed	Economic space; tutoring; community building	P1, P2, P3, P4

As I repeated this process for each case in Step 3, exploring and identifying patterns across each case, I sought connections and clustering of personal experiential statements. Independently analyzing each interview before moving on was a considerable factor in establishing and maintaining the idiographic approach (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Extracting common expressions from each participant allowed me to compile common themes about their experiences. This also allowed me to visually understand how the discrepant case of P5 differed from the rest.

P1-4 felt a small to moderate sense of community, whereas P5 felt engaged and satisfied with their sense of community. In addition, P2 - 4 had moderate impacts on their well-being, and P5 did not have a significant negative experience, as seen in the table below. Table 2 represents the GETs with the five participants labeled as P1, P2, P3, P4,

and P5. The categories include (a) overall experience, (b) community belonging, (c) impact on well-being, (d) self-esteem, (e) motivation, (f) challenges, and (g) needed support. These experiential themes shared emphasized each participant's unmet needs.

Table 2*Group Experiential Theme Impact Categories by Gender*

Category	P1 (Male)	P2 (Female)	P3 (Female)	P4 (Male)	P5 (Male)
Overall experience	Difficult due to lack of tech and racism	Lonely, some aspects easier	Difficult, esp. with technology	Isolating, robotic, lost connection	Positive, valuable
Community isolation	Some sense of belonging, felt isolated	Did not feel a sense of community	Limited sense of community	Lost sense of community, teachers adjusted well	Sense of community through group studies
Impact on well-being	Impacted by connectivity and self-motivation	Some stress but found flexibility	Experienced challenges due to lack of resources	Negatively impacted, felt like chores	Not significant
Self-esteem	Affected by lack of inperson interactions	Impacted by online learning	Needed more tutoring on tech and subjects	Affected; didn't retain much from online learning	Sense of community helped
Motivation	Driven by work and financial responsibilities	Financial scare motivated continuation	Family support but lacked resources	Motivated to complete degree, felt caged	Engaged and satisfied
External challenges	Family concerns impacted studies	Balancing parenting and work with studies	More tutoring on tech, communitybuilding	Loss of connection, cultural imbalance	No significant challenges
Needed support	Economic space, more tutoring	Tutoring on tech, communitybuilding	Blackboard/Canvas Training Technology	Tech support, general coursework	Support from instructors and classmates

A strong consideration for Table 2 would be to take note of the GETs, which represent the areas in which participants identified as having unmet needs from their experiences. During this iterative process, as more data was collected, I revisited the experiential themes, refining them and adding new insights which then formed the overall grouped experiential themes. The common connection among all participants was that each expressed a need for support in some way or another. P5 required support from their

instructors and classmates, whereas P2, P3, and P4 felt the shared need for technology support, and P1 expressed a need for more economic support as well as more course tutoring to aid in their overall well-being.

Personal Experiential Theme and Group Experiential Theme

Personal and grouped themes identified two primary categories among the experiential themes. The initial experiential themes (as they relate to the research question) were belonging, esteem, transcendence, the persistence of resilience, and the participant's identified needs. There were experiential themes from each participant unique to their individual experiences, which will be reviewed in the results section. The two main categories among many of these were positive experiences and/or negative experiences. For the PET of belonging, a positively associated category was expressed by P3 who said, "I felt connected to my classmates and professors as I belong here, they embraced me and helped me along the way." A negative category was expressed by P2 who, when asked if they felt like they belonged within their college community during the pandemic, stated, "Not at all; I feel like I am just another number," and P4 said, "I do not even remember the curriculum, teachers were well adjusted, but us students were not." While some participants expressed a sense of community and belonging, others noted feeling isolated and disconnected, which was particularly felt during extensive periods of isolation due to COVID-19 restrictions and shelter-in-place mandates. In that likeness with the theme of esteem, participants were categorized with positive connections as observed by statements like the following from P5: "I was proud to know that I could learn on my own and did not need validation from others." Negative categories of esteem

were observed by expressions like the following from P3: “So much was going wrong, I just wanted to give up.” The perceptions of self-worth via the esteem experiential theme revealed participants’ perceived value and competence within their online learning experience. Some felt confident in their achievements, while others struggled with feelings of inadequacy and heightened self-doubt. The same was discoverable via the theme of transcendence with positive and negative expressions, and through the theme of persistence of resilience, categories were identified by expressions of success and/or struggle. Their reflections on their sense of purpose and overall fulfillment from their academic journey were expressed, and some spoke to their aspirations for pursuing a higher education, like being a first-generation college student. Others shared in the painstaking reality that they struggled to find meaning and purpose in their studies. P4 mentioned feeling like they were self-teaching themselves, and since they had no clue of what they were doing, they were not sure they learned anything at all.

This section will equate social engagement to a sense of belonging and persistence to motivation for ease of understanding. From the literature review in Chapter 2, O’Neel promoted that belonging was a monumental motivation needed by all students while attending any academic institution (2021). Cole and Balcetis’ (2021) exploration of the goal promoting perception theory in Chapter 2, highlighted the realities of predispositions generated from an individual’s visual perception; yet, as it related to motivation, they noted that it was beneficially supportive of advanced goal pursuits via mental and environmental stimuli. Of note, when one expresses or pursues clearly defined goals and has appropriate environmental stimuli and practical implications to drive their actions in

alignment with said goals, they then are exposed to a higher likelihood of being persistently motivated to achieve their greatest academic outcomes.

Even during the pandemic, Daugherty (2020), in Chapter 2, highlighted that 76% of all undergraduates perceived that lack of motivation was their highest challenge and lack of social engagement was the second leading factor at 56%. In compiling a brief filter (by gender) within this study, it was difficult to tell whether this study shared Daugherty's findings about motivation. Among this study's total participants, with motivation as the focal point, two were identified as undergraduates, and both expressed a shared experiential sense of belonging. Extracting the discrepant case that ultimately shared a positive overall experience in all areas, there was an even split among genders for their overall sense of belonging. One male participant and female participant expressed a positive experiential sense of belonging, and one male participant and female participant did not experience a positive experiential sense of belonging, thus acknowledging the second leading factor of motivation, according to Daugherty. In measuring engagement/motivation, three participants (P1, P2, and P3) felt a negative association with persistence/motivation, whereas P4 and 5 obtained a good grasp on their ability to persist.

Overall, among the discoveries of their efforts to remain focused despite the compounding challenges they faced from every angle, these overwhelming circumstances prompted their reflection towards identifying what they needed to go beyond forced resilience to natural advancement or a natural evolutionary adaptation for survival purposes. From these themes, the identified needs encompassed categories like the need

for mental health resources, community and belonging, technological support, connection with teachers, family support, additional access to resources, and financial assistance.

There was a discrepant case where the participant, despite the challenges expressed and experienced, noted a uniquely positive overall perspective thus adding depth to the analysis. (P5, personal communication, April 26, 2024).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this research was applied by addressing the components of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Through credibility, I will share the strategies in which I work to ensure accurate representation of the research findings, like triangulation, extended intentional engagement, member checking, and peer debriefing. The paragraph on dependability will elaborate on how I applied a detailed audit trail and utilized the code-recode strategy that follows the IPA research design. For transferability, I will expound on how I applied rich, thick descriptions of the context settings and participant profiles exploring the studied phenomena and how purposeful sampling helped drive the participant selection. Lastly, I will share in the confirmability application where reflexive journaling was instrumental in ensuring that the results were purely fashioned after the participants' expressed lived experiences and not my own biases. Furthermore, the application of triangulation, expansive reflexivity, and audit trail utilization aided in establishing the complete application of trustworthiness within this

study.

Credibility

To intentionally ensure credibility, I first focused on prolonging the engagement with each participant. This was done by having the participants elaborate on their shared experiences and even requesting a second interview if the initial one did not meet the intended run time of 45 minutes. By having the semistructured open-ended 13 interview questions printed before each interview, I could focus on each participant's responses and their tone and expressiveness within them. Of note, some had heightened expressions of excitement and even real-time disappointment when reflecting on their experiences. Triangulation was applied during this period with the supplemental notes and continued journaling from start to finish. I was able to apply member checking in real-time as the transcripts of the recordings were displayed within the interview screen for each member to review and validate to ensure the accuracy of what was being said. Peer debriefing was applied through a few research methodology forums that allowed me to cross-check my analysis process.

Dependability

To intentionally ensure dependability, I maintained a detailed audit trail throughout the research process. This included the documentation of all preplanned and newly discovered decisions, changes, and rationale applied during the data collection phase. The IPA process requires a code–recode process that I applied where I stepped away from the initial data coded and revisited it to recode and check for consistency. I was quite intentional about following the research design for coding as this is instrumental in

maintaining dependability and transferability. Dependability also played a role in my application of peer examination which was mentioned in my credibility reference above. Smith and Nizza provide a detailed description of the IPA research design that allowed for ease of repetition for future studies.

Transferability

I applied rich, thick descriptions surrounding the research content and participants to ensure transferability. The context of the setting, location, environment, circumstances applicable to the research (each participant's lived experiences of being a Black online college student during COVID-19 and having unmet needs) as well as the participant's profiles (first-generation college student, the various majors of the participants, education, psychology, general studies, etc.). Providing this depth of information provides sufficiency for others to make informed conclusions about how these findings would apply to future, comparable studies. Lastly, for transferability, I utilized purposeful sampling for participant selection. With the topic of this research being about the perception of unmet needs of BOCS during COVID-19 it was necessary to exclusively find participants from diverse perspectives to enhance the context of this study to establish relevance.

Confirmability

Maintaining confirmability was easily applied through reflexive journaling, triangulation, iterative data analysis, negative case analysis, and audit trails. In addition to detailed notetaking for the entire process, before each interview, the participation criteria required verbal consent for participation and confirmation that each person met the study

qualification. Negative case analysis was applied to review the discrepant case in which, despite the opposing challenges, the participant expressed an overall positive experience. Some additional triangulation strategies I used were detailing my thoughts, feelings, perceived biases, and even confirmation biases to ensure that I accurately captured their experiences and reflections and not my own. One bias was that the participant with a major in education background would have a more positive outlook and knowledge because this would soon be the field they would be working in after attaining their degree. This was not the case. They had higher expectations for their experiences and the failure of their institution to meet those expectations led to higher dissatisfaction surrounding their entire collegian experience; nevertheless, it also added to their motivation to be the change they desired to see within higher education realms.

Results

This study was conducted to understand the perceptions of unmet needs of BOCS during the COVID-19- pandemic. Utilizing Smith and Nizza's (2022) IPA model to understand participants' feelings regarding their lived experiences, I could appreciate contributing factors that aided in their overall resilience in overcoming challenges to improve their academic motivation. The study's results revealed diverse experiences among these BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic. PETs related to belonging, esteem, transcendence, and persistence (Rovai's composite persistence model) were intentionally explored. The needs that were identified within the study highlighted the challenges faced by participants, including the need for increased mental health support, technology assistance, and access to resources. From observation of the results, assumptions were

confirmed, and discoveries were revealed. The results unveiled some uniquely diverse perceptions among the study's population. Based on the research question inquiring about the perceptions of unmet needs of BOCS during COVID-19, themes relating to belonging, esteem, transcendence, and persistence were purposefully and richly observed.

In addition, themes emerged from each participant.

A discovery of mixed feelings related to the identified themes was expressed in detail in each participant's interview. As anticipated, some of the assumed needs did support historical trends for this population, like the importance of community and gaining a sense of belonging, as well as the all too familiar expressed need for mental health support and financial assistance. Discoveries were collectively described as needs being exacerbated due to mandated isolation and unpredictable technological barriers. Ultimately, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a lot of uncontrollable responses and decisions because there were more unknown causes and effects than expected. As it pertains to the collective opinion of the participants, higher educational institutions should focus on adjusting to adapt to circumstances that happen outside of the control of the masses, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, additional consideration should be given to existential circumstances comparable to pandemic-like events that are guaranteed to have a greater impact on the entire student body, but that compound struggles for the marginalized and minority populations.

Based on these results, male and female BOCS experienced various challenges. Male participants reported higher experiences of isolation and technological difficulties, whereas female participants expressed shared encounters of stress and pressure related to

a lack of community. Both genders ultimately had to manage many responsibilities while facing the common daily and general stressors from their online college experience despite the pandemic.

According to Rovai's composite persistence model, the primary factors that influence a student's ability to persist and obtain academic achievement in higher education before and after admission impact the trajectory of their academic achievement. Before admissions, Rovai proposed that age, ethnicity, gender, intellectual development, academic performance, and preparation were key factors influencing persistence. Rovai noted that external factors after admissions generated similar impacts from financial challenges and even familiar responsibilities. In comparing Rovai's persistence model to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the outcome of this study, internal factors like academic and social integration created serious struggles, and students expressed feelings of isolation from their learning community. From their responses, their motivations were driven by their financial and personal responsibilities; however, COVID-19, coupled with the online format, caused institutional commitment to be less than favorable. The participants collectively expressed similar needs for the online learning community to support areas of tutoring, technological support, intentional accessibility to services that address unmet needs, and a support system that nurtures and develops interpersonal relationships. Notably, pedagogical misalignment added to experienced challenges, and Rovai established it as an important internal consideration among learning and teaching styles after admissions, which impacts a learner's

persistence.

Technological, social, and emotional challenges faced by students were heightened in the wake of COVID-19. The lived experiences of this student population navigating through their daily needs of survival coupled with magnified issues of technological access, community isolation, and other impacts on their well-being and motivation were explored. Although some participants shared common struggles like difficulty navigating their online learning platform, intense feelings of mandated isolation, and diminished self-esteem, others found ways to cope and connect, displaying the diversity within this unprecedented pandemic phenomenon of the present day. Examining these experiences, the purpose is to display the various support needs of Black online students, which were unmet during COVID-19.

Group Experiential Theme 1: Technological Challenges and Support Needs

Theme 1, technological challenges and support needs, showed participants' related experiences and identified that P1 and P3 shared that lacking technology made it difficult to remain motivated. Under the umbrella of the need for technological support, P3 and P4 shared that they would have benefited from having tutoring for their online course, especially for those who experienced switches between Canvas and Blackboard. The technological challenges faced by the participants were relational in the perception of failed support. P1 shared, "It was difficult to access life with technology and internet connection." P3 commented, "Coming from a brick-and-mortar school, when I got online, I had to struggle a bit over the classes." "I didn't know about online features with Blackboard and now I had to try to figure out Canvas," shared P4.

Group Experiential Theme 2: Community and Isolation

For Theme 2, community and isolation, P1-P5 expressed feeling isolated and a minimized sense of community. P5, as the discrepant case, did not have a highly negative experience; nevertheless, P5 shared they could only gain a sense of community through grouped studies. In addition to the realities of strained opportunities for community building in an online learning environment, COVID-19 introduced mandated isolation that exacerbated the feelings of poor community engagement and extended isolation. P1 shared, “Not often, but some friends and colleagues would call to check on me.” P2 said, I would say the social aspect of Black people seemed to be very community based and there is no sense of community in online colleges... there are clubs, but they

are not really connected. There was no way to get back to your peers.

P3 shared, “I think it was hard for all students, but for me, even though I had the support of my family, they were struggling too so I had to do it alone.” P4 shared, “Not having people I can talk to in person gave me symptoms of depression.” Yet, contrary to the poor perception of experiences expressed by P1 through P4, P5 positively noted, “We have different group studies, and we’d all get together to study” as their fix to feelings of poor community and isolation.

Group Experiential Theme 3: Impact on Well-Being and Self-Esteem

For Theme 3, impact on well-being and self-esteem, P1, P2, and P4 provided shared feelings that their impacts were driven by connectivity issues, their work feeling obligatory like chores, and the lack of in-person interaction negatively impacted their overall online learning experience. In response to the question, how has online learning

during the pandemic affected your overall well-being, if at all, P 1 opened by stating, “Little to no access made things difficult and both me having COVID and friends and family having COVID impacted my well-being and self-esteem. It makes you unable to concentrate.” P2 stated,

It was more stressful there is no sense of community, and it is hard to get to know peers... feels like I am not actually learning because I am teaching myself... but things did get a little better being online though.

Concerning how online learning during the pandemic affected overall well-being, P4 first noted the isolation impacted their well-being stating, “Not having the people I wanted or needed to talk to in person definitely gave me depression and having a degree in social work I can identify what that feels like.”

Group Experiential Theme 4: Motivation and Engagement

For GET Theme 4, motivation and engagement, P1-P4 expressed common feelings of motivation being driven by external factors like work, finances, family, and degree completion. They also shared commonalities of feeling unengaged and dissatisfied, whereas P5 had an opposing view and expressed feeling quite engaged and satisfied. P1 shared,

My motivation was for both me and my parents so I can help but assist my parents at home as well. As an introvert, I didn't like going out, so little engagement was okay. I just sometimes talk on the phone or WhatsApp, maybe like Facebook. P2 said, “I think that it was a difficult adjustment for everyone. The structure changed, even though we've already been doing online courses, and then people kind of got used

to it, and it hasn't gone back." P3 noted, "It didn't help that my friends were dropping their classes because they didn't want to go online, because it was too difficult, it was hard trying to learn Blackboard." P4 stated,

Studying for bachelor of philosophy in creative writing, I would love being in person, but the pandemic happened, and I lost the connection that I needed if I were in school, right... because I am doing a humanities degree. this felt inhumane, it felt robotic, very isolating... I lost connections with my classmates, I lost connection with my instructors, and everyone became a lot less responsive.... I felt like I was being caged in... online school felt more like chores than things that would help me increase my knowledge....it was also a cultural imbalance that I didn't appreciate.

Group Experiential Theme 5: Challenges and Support

The final theme of challenges and support was grouped by two shared personal experiential thoughts of balancing responsibilities and additional support needed from P1-P4. P1 shared their challenges by describing their experience, saying,

During the pandemic, there were difficulties to figure out how to do things from home... my mom as my support system was concerned for my mental health and wanted me to work on balance between school, life, and work... financial challenges were heightened.

P2 shared about their challenged experience by explaining, "Being a parent made it difficult, having a full-time job made it difficult, COVID made it difficult, protests going on made it difficult... it was a struggle, " when asked the question, have there been times

when challenges outside of yourself made it hard for you to continue with your online studies? P3 noted,

Trying to learn Blackboard, was whew... would have liked to have more support with tutoring. I had the support of my family, but they were going through it too and with my kids... they even tried to help me out but also never heard of Blackboard... and I am sure it was difficult for the teachers too.

P4 expressed,

With the cultural perceptions of persistence that definitely influenced my experience but added to the challenge of the work and effort alone. I know my teachers had online experience prior, so they were well-adjusted... I didn't know that looked like what they call "independent learning."

The discrepant case was with P5 who shared their experience with the question, "I didn't really face any challenges." When P5 was asked about the support they needed shared, "I think it was a very valuable experience... I like being in class online, and I used the resources available."

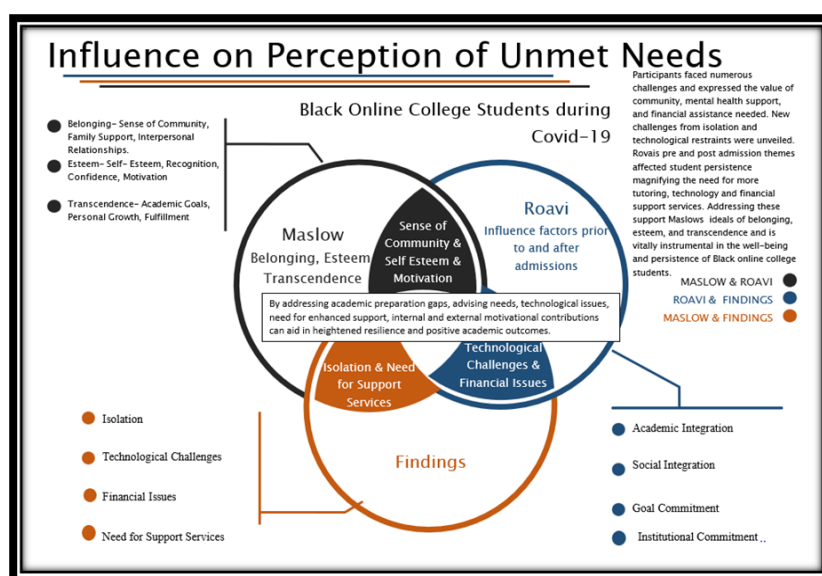
Group Experiential Theme Overall Results

These group results (as seen in Table 1) were formed from the collective findings of the PETs that respond to the question of this study: What are the perceptions of unmet needs of BOCS during COVID-19? From the highest participant counts to the lowest ranking, the motivation and engagement GET was ranked highest, with four participants agreeing that motivation and engagement, or lack thereof, contributed to their unmet needs. Community and isolation ranked at number 2, with again four of the five

participants listing this commonality as a needs challenge. Next was well-being and self-esteem, charting third overall and ranked as an unmet need impacting their motivation. Technological challenges, support needs, and external challenges and support are tied for the lowest yet common concern of unmet needs.

Figure 1

Venn Diagram of Maslow and Rovai's Intersectional Contributions and Outcomes



Through conducting additional thematic analysis from the theme of Online Learning Experiences During COVID-19, seven experiential themes warranted attention. The expressed experiences were difficulty and isolation, motivation and support, impact on well-being and self-esteem, sense of community, engagement, and satisfaction. This alternatively concluded with their expressed and identified challenges and further confirming much-needed support. Among this group, P5 stood out the most in that their overall analysis was met with a positive and valuable experience, they felt sufficiently

engaged and satisfied, and they developed a healthy sense of community among their study groups.

The positive experience of P5 suggests that online education can provide opportunities for students to transcend immediate challenges and engage meaningfully with their learning environment. However, for other participants, barriers to belonging and esteem may have hindered their ability to transcend their circumstances. Therefore, addressing these needs is essential for promoting the well-being and persistence of BOCS during COVID-19. Within the theme of motivation, it was discovered that many of the participants' motivations were external, as seen with responses like participants being motivated by work and financial responsibilities (outside of themselves), financial scares, motivated to get tutoring for fear of failure and rejection, and the motivation to be able to obtain the career that comes from having pursued the degree (social work). The exceptional data that did not conform to the other participants was with P5, who found self-transcendence to be their driving factor of motivation.

Despite the varying degrees of BET, all participants had a deeply rooted motivation to succeed no matter what. This speaks to the resistance that Black individuals are said to possess despite any challenges and obstacles faced uniquely. These themes and groups reflect the multifaceted experiences of Black college students navigating online learning amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of addressing systemic barriers, promoting inclusivity, and providing adequate support to ensure educational equity and student well-being. Figure 2 reflects the experiences with online learning based on gender and graduate status.

Figure 2

Experiences by Gender and Graduate Year

<p>Female Participants (1 & 3):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both female participants expressed struggles with online learning, feeling disconnected, and experiencing negative impacts on their well-being. • They both highlighted the importance of belonging and community support, but Participant 1 felt a negative sense of belonging compared to Participant 3. • Participant 1 reported a negative impact on self-esteem, while Participant 3 had a mixed impact. • Both emphasized the need for more attention to mental health resources and technology support for Black students. <p>Male Participants (2 & 4):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both male participants found a sense of belonging in their college community during the pandemic. • Participant 2 reported positive self-esteem, while Participant 4 experienced negative self-esteem due to technical issues. • They both highlighted the importance of mental health resources and technology support for Black students. <p>Overall Gender Comparison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female participants seemed to struggle more with the transition to online learning and experienced more negative impacts on well-being and self-esteem. • Male participants generally reported a more positive experience in terms of belonging and self-esteem, but still highlighted the need for support resources. <p>Comparison by Graduate and Undergraduate Status:</p> <p>Graduate Participants (1 & 3):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both graduate participants struggled with online learning and experienced negative impacts on well-being and self-esteem. • They emphasized the need for mental health resources and technology support for Black students. <p>Undergraduate Participants (2 & 4):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both undergraduate participants found a sense of belonging in their college community during the pandemic. • Participant 2 reported positive self-esteem, while Participant 4 experienced negative self-esteem due to technical issues. • They also highlighted the importance of mental health resources and technology support for Black students. <p>Overall Status Comparison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate participants seemed to struggle more with online learning and experienced more negative impacts on well-being and self-esteem compared to undergraduate participants. • Both groups emphasized the importance of support resources, particularly for mental health and technology. <p>Comparison based on Responses compared to Outcomes:</p> <p>Positive Responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant 2 (Undergraduate Male) and Participant 5 (Graduate Male) reported positive experiences in terms of belonging, self-esteem, and personal growth. • These participants found opportunities for growth and adaptation despite the challenges posed by online learning. <p>Mixed/Negative Responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant 1 (Graduate Female) and Participant 3 (Graduate Female) reported struggles with online learning, negative impacts on well-being, and a lack of belonging. • Participant 4 (Undergraduate Male) also faced challenges, particularly with self-esteem and technical issues. <p>Overall Outcome Comparison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants with positive responses generally had positive outcomes, while those with mixed/negative responses struggled more with online learning and reported negative outcomes.

Identified Assumptions

Assumption 1. Male participants had a more positive experience with online learning than female participants did, which may not hold true for all cases, as seen with P4 (undergraduate male) experiencing similar struggles to the female participants.

Assumption 2. Graduate students are more equipped to handle online learning than undergraduates, but both groups faced similar challenges, suggesting that level of education does not necessarily correlate with ease of adaptation to online learning.

Assumption 3. Positive responses to online learning that would lead to positive outcomes regarding well-being and self-esteem may only sometimes be applicable, as seen with P4 (undergraduate male), who had a positive response but still experienced adverse outcomes.

A review of prior literature on the assumed needs of online college students highlighted the challenges faced by online college students without applying the unique challenges posed by the pandemic to BOCS experiences and emphasizing the necessity for customized interventions and targeted support systems. This current study uniquely underlined the importance of addressing these unique challenges identified as unmet needs to promote BOCS' well-being and academic success amidst adversity. Overall, the results provided valuable insights into the experiences and needs of this population, contributing to the existing literature on motivation and resilience in higher education contexts, as seen from Table 3.

Table 3

Perceptions (Positive/Negative-Maslow's Needs Hierarchy and Rovai's Persistence

Model)

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Belonging</u>	<u>Esteem</u>	<u>Transcendence</u>	<u>Persistence</u>
1	–	–	–	–
2	–	–	+	–
3	–	–	+	–
4	–	–	–	+
5	+	+	+	+

The data analysis revealed themes and clusters detailing actual needs among the participants, including mental health resources, community and belonging, mental health support, technology support, connection with teachers, familiar support, additional access to resources, and financial support. Compared with historical trends, some assumed needs aligned with the current actual needs, but there were variations and extensions primarily due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This included minimized teacher connection, decreased communication, and compromised technology functionality due to increased online learning and learners. Additionally, the isolation caused by the pandemic and its impact on access to resources further exacerbated these challenges. The outcomes of this comparison highlighted that despite the visible increase in the online educational footprint, academic expectations remained unchanged. However, there was a lack of consistent support to match those increases across the board. Access to available resources varied based on financial class and geographical location, with those having better access experiencing optimal outcomes compared to those facing increased struggles due to loss of financial income and isolation, which limited access to potential support resources.

Although prior literature accurately identified many of the participants' needs, the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic led to variations and anomalies beyond typical financial and personal strains, affecting learners' motivation and ability to achieve high academic outcomes. The outcomes of this comparison indicate that academic expectations remained unchanged despite the increase in online education, but there was a lack of consistent support for the observed increases across various domains. Access to available resources varied based on financial class and geographical location, with disparities impacting outcomes for different groups of participants.

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly influenced the support needs of BOCS, underscoring the importance of providing tailored interventions and dedicated resources to address their unique challenges. While some historically assumed needs aligned with current actual needs, the pandemic introduced new challenges and exacerbated existing ones. The pandemic, with its associated isolation and compounding disruptions, exacerbated existing challenges and introduced new ones, particularly regarding access to resources and support systems among Black communities. This included difficulties in accessing resources and support systems within Black communities, such as the disengagement of teacher connection and compromised technology functionality. Additionally, the persistence of challenges related to mental health, community, technology, and financial support underscored the ongoing need for targeted interventions and resources to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic on academic success and student well-being. Despite the expansion of online education, the findings

suggested that academic expectations remained essentially unchanged, with disparities in access to resources further accentuated by socioeconomic factors and geographical location. Despite the expansion of online education, academic expectations remained essentially unchanged, with inequalities in access to resources accentuated by socioeconomic factors and geographical location. Thus, it underscored the importance of tailored support mechanisms and equitable resource allocation to address the diverse needs of BOCS and ensure their academic resilience in the face of unprecedented challenges.

The research aimed to investigate the perceptions of unmet needs among BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic, utilizing IPA to delve into their lived experiences. Through qualitative exploration, the study sought to uncover emerging grouped and PETs and understand factors potentially contributing to poor academic achievement. For the scope of this investigation, this study contributed to motivation literature by examining alignment with Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Rovai's composite persistence model. In summarizing the answers to the research question, the study delved into the perceptions of unmet needs of BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through qualitative exploration, several discoveries emerged among participants involving belonging, esteem, transcendence, and persistence. Strategies including but not limited to triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, and detailed transcription and coding were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. The participants, recruited through the Walden Student Research Pool and other non-Walden social media outlets, consisted of BOCS

exclusively attending online courses before and during COVID-19. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted, lasting approximately 45 minutes each.

Hermeneutic analysis revealed various categories and themes, including belonging, esteem, transcendence, and persistence of Rovai, reflecting diverse experiences among participants and highlighting challenges such as lack of mental health resources, community support, and technology assistance. Identified needs encompassed mental health resources, community and belonging, technology support, connection with teachers, familiar support, additional access to resources, and financial support. While some assumed needs aligned with actual needs, there were variations beyond historical trends due to the impact of the pandemic, as seen in unchanged academic expectations and inconsistent support increases across various domains. Despite the rise in online education, academic expectations remained unchanged, with disparities in access to resources based on financial class and geographical location.

Overall, the study provided valuable insights into BOCS' rich and detailed experiences and needs during the pandemic, emphasizing the importance of tailored support mechanisms and equitable resource allocation to promote academic resilience. Moreover, the study stresses the importance of tailored support mechanisms and equitable resource allocation. Transitioning to Chapter 5, the results revealed daily and diverse experiences among BOCS, highlighting the necessity of addressing their needs to promote well-being and academic success. Table 1 and Table 2 summarized participant perceptions and the impact of actual and assumed needs, respectively, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by this population amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Amid the heightened demand for social change relevant to individuals like me, Black college students navigated the challenges of attending classes entirely online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's purpose was to explore BOCS' perceptions of their unmet needs during COVID-19. The research was conducted to explore and understand the unique challenges faced by this demographic of students and how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted them and their outcomes. By examining participants' perceptions of their experiences, the study's aim was to highlight potential gaps in their support systems, resources, and engagement strategies that were otherwise assumed to have been met or addressed according to institutional performance checklists. What was unknown was how these impacts may have affected their well-being academically and personally. The intention was to gain and contribute valuable insight that improves future educational initiatives toward supporting these BOCS and other marginalized student populations as an intentional engagement of positive social change.

The findings of this study add to the existing literature on the experiences of BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic. By exploring the perceptions of unmet needs among BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study aligns with existing literature on motivation and resilience. The experiential themes relating to belonging, esteem, and transcendence of Maslow and the composite persistence of Rovai both expand and encapsulate previous research on student experiences in higher education. The study confirms that BOCS faced unique challenges related to belonging, esteem, transcendence,

and persistence during this time, which aligns with previous research indicating the impact of environmental factors on academic achievement. Additionally, the study and analysis reveal actual needs among participants, such as mental health resources, community support, and technology assistance, which were exacerbated by the pandemic. The findings unveiled the positive and negative senses of belonging and self-worth, echoing findings in literature regarding the importance of social support and confidence in academic success. While some assumptions about participants' needs aligned with actual needs, there were variations beyond historical trends due to the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic.

Interpretation of the Findings

Findings of the Study

The findings of this study reflect the unique experiences of the five participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5), whose PETs uncovered diverse yet interconnected challenges and unmet needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. From these PETs, GETs emerged, unveiling trends and valuable insight from this within this demographic. The GETs that formed were technological, community, impact on well-being, motivation, as well as external challenges and needed support.

Technological challenges were acknowledged in previous literature with Whitaker (2022) exploring challenges of Black students among the online learning environment; however, they were only able to confirm limited understanding among this demographic. Alkabaa (2022) confirmed technological gaps between instructors and students, which led to overall student dissatisfaction. The study noted similar challenges, including

limited access to Blackboard, inexperience with learning platforms among teachers, and asynchronous limitations, which created undue stress as both students and teachers were ill-equipped.

As it pertained to community and isolation, participants shared varying degrees of connection, isolation, and quite limited sense of belonging among graduate participants (P1 and P3). The undergraduate participants (P2 and P4) shared a higher sense of belonging which was contributed to grouped studies and various forms of peer engagement. This GET highlighted the elevated importance of fostering an environment where community and isolation were the main focus to improve well-being, which was especially true for the online student population.

Prior literature confirmed community and isolation in a few previously shared studies. In a 2020 study from Mills confirmed heightened academic resilience among the Black college student population despite the campus climate they may have experienced. While the study from Grynyuk et al., (2022) seemingly confirmed a positive overall experience with community and isolation, they were not able to confirm this perception among the Black student population, thus building on the reality that this population requires a more detailed assessment. Ellis et al. (2019) shared in the value that inclusive communities would have among the Black student populations to improve community and to minimize feelings of isolation. Blackmon and Davis (2019) built upon this thought by elaborating the necessity of providing culturally relevant content as well as teaching methods to build and foster supportive communities among this and similar student populations.

Regarding the impact on the well-being GET, all participants shared in COVID19's impact on their mental and emotional well-being. Limited access to technology and other important resources aided in their feelings of disruption and disconnection as reported by P1 and P3. Feelings of detachment were reported by P4 as it related to their impact on their well-being. Overall, these combined experiences demonstrated this GET sufficiently in noting that mental health and emotional resilience improvement would only be adequately addressed with an intentionally focused support system for these identified needs.

The impact on wellbeing and self-esteem was explored and confirmed among Chandra's 2020 study where students reported exponential stress level impacting their wellbeing and self-esteem like this study's findings. Concentration and performance were identified as specific areas of decline. Holland and Zimmerman (2022) shared in experiences of racial discrimination albeit subtle it was noted as negatively impactful to the study participants sense of value, self-worth, and social connection. Addressing self-esteem when considering factors that promote achievement was confirmed in the study by Zhang et al. (2022).

The self-esteem GET evolved from the participants shared experiences of their inability to adapt to the online learning requirements. Both P1 and P4 discovered their self-confidence declining from the failed face to face experiences they were accustomed to. Conversely, P5 reported an ultimately positive experience overall and demonstrated the beneficial impact of community support on self-esteem, emphasizing the grouped discovery that both individual and environmental factors shape self-esteem.

Motivation was the GET that was developed from combined experiences of financial concerns and external responsibilities like parenting or attempting to maintain a school-life, work-life, home-life balance. The commonalities of P1 and P2 was that their motivation was driven by financial necessity, whereas P3 and P4 expressed feelings of non-motivation due to feeling caged in, or from the monotony of repetitious work and isolated online learning. The discrepant case was noted in P5's experience where they expressed their individualized sense of purpose and intrinsic motivation aided in their ability to gain and maintain eagerness and vigor for academic success.

Williams et al. (2017) confirmed their studies motivation and engagement experiences which extended from their interactive learning activities to their online discussions, and group projects that were strategically intentional in fostering engagement and motivating students to apply active participation. The previous literature of Daugherty quoted 76% of the undergraduates among their study in perceiving their lack of motivation as their highest challenge. Also, within this study 56% of the students perceived second highest reported concern was lack of social engagement amid pandemic mandates (Daugherty, 2020). The study by Gut and Smith promoted faculty interactions and mentorship as an opportunity to address the uniqueness of students needs that would likewise aid in additional instances of motivation. Transcendence was described as a motivator in Bird and Lindsey's 2020 study promoting the value of connecting with something beyond oneself which likewise enhances social justice.

The last GET identified was challenges and needed support which stemmed from

P1, P3, and P4 sharing various external components like technological barriers and P1 and P3 highlighting a lack of tailored support among the Black student population as their shared challenges. Among the participants the notable need for tailored mental health resources, community-building, and technological training was the consensus. From this GET the discovery of tailored interventions and resource allocation are vital in acknowledging that there are unmet needs among this population and the next step would then be to address these challenges.

Aligning with the assumed needs that previous literature suggested, Davison and Richmond (2018) confirmed barriers among Black students' persistence was financial challenges and limited access to resources. Thus, building upon the need for targeted support that will improve retention rates. Thelamour et al. (2019) confirmed marginalized experiences among Black students and their sense of belonging, which supports and confirms the need for support of tailored interventions. Kelliher (2022) confirmed unmet needs with basic need insecurities existing among the HBCU students.

Merging these PETs and GETs provided an expanded understanding of the compounding impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on this population and, furthermore, brought awareness to the lived experiences of BOCS. These findings went on to bring awareness that educational institutions need to be more intentional about establishing inclusive policies that not only address but meet the students' expressed academic, emotional, and technological needs. Comprehensive intervention work will not only support student inclusivity among minority populations but will likewise richly improve their motivation towards future academic and personal success.

Davison and Richmond (2018) suggested that for online college students, needs were technical and financial, proposing that institutions sufficiently addressed and provided resources to meet those known and easily discoverable needs as revealed in the research by Kelliher (2022). Nevertheless, to identify the true needs of the student body especially this population of BOCS it was necessary to understand the experiences that inspired their perception of their unmet needs. Motivational measures slightly varied among the participants; however, the commonality among them all, was family and peer/community support as a driver their self-motivation. Confirming that motivation and academic outcomes were impacted if needs are not met. Despite most participants holding the perceptions of internal and external factors hindering their productivity in their academic pursuits, the discrepant case identified that their positive academic success and overall positive well-being was fostered and motivated by their own drive towards their decision making.

Findings in Relation to Literature

The findings from this study provided insight into the unmet needs of BOCS during COVID-19. Chapter 5 shares in the study's discoveries concerning existing literature as described in Chapter 2 reporting findings that were supportive, dispelling, or expounding on current knowledge in the field. Furthermore, the findings were analyzed with consideration of the conceptual framework of Maslow and Rovai, so interpretations remained grounded within the data collection. Previous literature identified unmet needs as financial and technological and further proposed that unmet needs and resources required to meet those needs were easily available and readily accessible.

Confirming Existing Knowledge

Literature reported challenges faced by Black students learning online can be found in numerous articles. For example, findings reported by Davison and Richmond (2018) share a common experience of limited access to resources as discoverable by expressed concerns of available technology, internet access, and lack of career development. This study confirmed the challenges noted with participants expressing similar experiences of poor internet connectivity and a lack of proper support devices. Ellis et al. (2019) research was supportive of the need for inclusivity among the Black online student community and also noted how valuable institutional support is for Black students, supported by claims with shared participant expressions of needs relating to institutional support—specifically with academic counselling and better tech support. Prior research (Bailey & Griffin, 2021; Hillman, 2021; Maramba & Burnett, 2021; Palmer et al., 2020; and Roberson, 2021) combined with this study strengthen the argument that Black students' needs within online learning went beyond academics, and institutional support should be reviewed with a more thorough and intentional lens.

Combatting Existing Knowledge

Although there were findings that supported prior research, this study did disconfirm some assumptions, providing unique insights to unveiling the unmet needs of BOCS. Consider the reference (Williams et al., 2017) of personal and social needs being supplementally met with the same online platforms used for the educational environment like zoom and google meet for virtual peer support. The existing body of literature on

BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted various challenges, such as limited access to technology, inadequate institutional support, and the need for culturally relevant teaching methods (Davison & Richmond, 2018; Blackmon & Davis, 2019). However, some studies challenge these prevalent narratives. For instance, research by Smith and Lee (2021) suggested that certain institutional initiatives effectively addressed technological barriers, indicating that access issues may not have been as widespread as previously thought. Similarly, Johnson and Taylor (2022) found that some Black students reported receiving adequate institutional support, contradicting the general perception of insufficiency.

Moreover, while Blackmon and Davis (2019) emphasize the importance of culturally relevant content, Roberts, and Nguyen (2021) argued that traditional teaching methods were equally effective for some students, suggesting a potential overemphasis on cultural specificity. In terms of social and emotional support, Thompson et al. (2021) presented findings that such support did not significantly impact academic success, challenging the focus on belonging and community. Additionally, Harris and Patel (2021) noted that some Black students did not perceive financial constraints as major obstacles, which contrasts with earlier studies highlighting these as critical barriers (Davison & Richmond, 2018).

Further complicating the narrative, Walker and Green (2022) highlighted instances where Black students demonstrated resilience by overcoming barriers without institutional aid, questioning the extent to which institutional support was necessary. Martinez and

Brooks (2021) presented evidence that effective equity and inclusion efforts were implemented in some cases, countering claims of widespread neglect. Finally, Carter and Young (2022) found that mental health challenges were not as pervasive among Black students as previously believed, suggesting a need to reassess the focus on unmet mental health needs.

Participants within these studies shared genuine feelings of isolation and experienced disconnection due to the virtual platform/format not being as collaborative as it was intended. The idea of virtual collaboration to meet social needs felt forced according to participants and rang especially true with the stay-at-home orders mandated across the nation. In addition to attending online courses and not having a break from devices, to then be encouraged to disconnect and socially reconnect, but it be through the same means of communication as the classroom environment provided no clear separation. Participants shared it was overwhelming and depressing. Thus, highlighting the failed opportunities of BOCS having their social and emotional needs met. Further challenging the notion that the virtual environment can perhaps mirror support received and or experienced from a brick-and-mortar institution.

Prior literature also shared the idea that the digital literacy and tech savviness among these demographics adapt effortlessly. Suggesting any skill adjustments needed would be minor and quickly resolved. In contrast, this study revealed that even among the assumed “digitally advanced and tech savvy” demographics, how easy it is to stereotype and project assumptions among various groups and populations. With or without the assumption, there remained technological struggles. From learning new platforms to

(events outside of their control) connectivity constraints and system outages. This revelation of deficiencies with “digital readiness” and institutional support for accessibility to educational tools and resources, as proposed compliance is inaccurate. Digital proficiencies should not be a blanket assumptive skill set. When institutions confidently promote academic success, they must consider actual needs above or instead of assumed needs.

Extension of Knowledge in Literature

In addition to confirming and combating prior knowledge, this study expounded on existing literary knowledge by revealing that unmet needs were not extensively explored. The existing literature on BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of community, belonging, and tailored support to address their unique challenges. Strayhorn (2019) expands on the concept of belonging as a critical component of educational success, aligning with Ellis et al. (2019), who emphasized the necessity of building a supportive virtual community. Strayhorn’s model links belonging to motivation and self-actualization, suggested that these elements were crucial for student success. Similarly, Korpershoek et al. (2019) explored the relationship between belonging, motivation, and academic outcomes, reinforcing the need for inclusive educational environments that Ellis et al. advocate for, to mitigate feelings of isolation and disconnectedness.

Additional studies, such as those by Thelamour et al. (2019) and Potts (2021), delve into the marginalization of Black students and their sense of belonging during COVID-19, building on the observations by Ellis et al. (2019) regarding isolation in

virtual settings. These findings highlighted the critical need for culturally relevant content and teaching strategies, as discussed by Blackmon and Davis (2019), to enhance engagement and academic success. Zhang et al. (2022) further emphasized the role of real-time feedback and course preparation in fostering self-esteem, echoing Gut & Smith's (2021) points on the significance of meaningful faculty interactions for positive academic experiences.

Rovai's Composite Persistence Model (2003) offered a comprehensive framework that considered online learning contexts and factors impacting student persistence, complementing the barriers highlighted by Davison and Richmond (2018). This model provided a structure to understand how BET can influence persistence, as discussed by Bird and Lindsey (2020) and Huang, Li, and Hsu (2022). These studies explore transcendence within educational settings, applying foundational theories by Maslow and Herzberg to the experiences of Black students during the pandemic.

Finally, Whitaker (2022) underscored the necessity for increased investment in online services and community opportunities for Black students. This aligned with the overarching theme from Ellis et al. (2019) and others about the importance of robust support systems. Collectively, these references enhanced the existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence and theoretical insights that highlight the urgent need for culturally responsive teaching practices, meaningful faculty interactions, and the creation of inclusive virtual communities to support BOCS effectively.

Literature does cover academic and technological needs while this study unveiled a grave need for mental health support more specifically to the compounding challenges

experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study uncovered participants shared expressions of heightened stress, pressure, and anxiety that was then exacerbated by racial and socioeconomic pressures expressed when participants discuss how they felt and how the riots and political unrest made things more stressed induced. Thus, the need to expand the scope of current research by highlighting the mental health phenomenon on this already marginalized population. Participants shared in their unique yet reasonable quest to gain or establish virtually relevant resources and programming, which was yet another note not observed in existing literature. Thus far, discovered was, the effective support for a BOCS may require customization that reaches and meets identified needs these revelations support new perspectives to consider at institutional level to best identify and or meet the expressed needs.

Conceptual Framework Analysis

The findings closely align with the studies conceptual framework bringing attention to educational equity and systemic challenges that many marginalized groups face. The study highlights the ongoing challenges related to inadequate resources and limited access to mental health support, which disproportionately affect BOCS. These challenges reflect broader systemic inequalities in education. The framework for the study is based on Rovai's composite persistence model and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, providing insight into the internal and external factors that shape students' motivation and their drive for academic success. By understanding these needs, the study proposes practical strategies to improve academic persistence among BOCS, especially in the context of COVID-19. Ultimately, the goal is to create a collaborative and, most

importantly, equitable educational environment that prepares students for a promising future, grounded in persistence and resilience.

Limitations of the Study

While there were numerous limitations to this study, there were reasonable measures that were taken to minimize and/or eliminate them. By being aware of potential biases, utilizing semi-structured open-ended interviews, minimizing distractions during data collection, and following the IPA model, the study concretely consisted of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability deeming it trustworthy. It was conducted with rigor and provided valuable insights into the experiences of BOCS during COVID-19. In this study, several limitations, both assumed and actual, were encountered, each requiring specific measures for management and mitigation.

Assumed limitations included potential selection bias due to recruitment from specific pools, which could have limited the generalizability of the findings, and researcher bias in data interpretation, despite efforts to mitigate bias through reflexivity and peer review measures. To address these assumptions, the study employed a semistructured open-ended interview approach, allowing for diverse perspectives and minimizing potential biases. Additionally, data analysis tools were utilized to ensure rigor and consistency in the analysis process. Managing biases, response consistency, data collection, and data analysis held the most significant potential limitations.

One considerable limitation arose from internet connectivity challenges that disallowed the successful completion of some audio interviews. Additionally, due to the nature of an asynchronous recruitment method with the use of social media, there was a

saturation of international participant responses, posing scheduling challenges due to different time zones. To address these issues, I adapted the study by extending the prescreening and criteria confirmation review questions to include students who were within the Eastern and Central Standard time zones, thus accommodating participants facing technological constraints and/or time zone differences. Nevertheless, considerations were made to maintain communication and flexibility in scheduling to ensure the participation of all applicable respondents.

Recommendations

Based on the strengths and limitations of the current study, as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, several recommendations for further research are suggested. Future studies could explore the experiences of BOCS across different institutional contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their needs and challenges. Additionally, longitudinal studies could track students' experiences over time to assess the long-term impact of the pandemic on academic persistence and success. Methodologically, researchers could employ mixed methods approaches to triangulate findings and provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing BOCS' experiences. Theoretical implications include further exploration of the intersectionality of race, motivation theory, and online education to develop more comprehensive frameworks for understanding student resilience.

Implications

The findings of this study have strong implications for positive social change at multiple levels. At the individual level, understanding the needs and challenges of BOCS

could inform targeted support interventions to promote their academic success and wellbeing. Family and organizational implications include the development of inclusive educational practices and policies that address the digital divide and promote equitable access to resources. Societal and policy implications involve advocating for systemic changes to address the underlying disparities that impact Black communities in higher education. This includes initiatives to increase broadband access, provide mental health support, and address socioeconomic barriers to educational attainment. Methodologically, the study highlights the importance of qualitative research in capturing the nuanced experiences of marginalized populations in higher education. Theoretical implications include the refinement of existing models of motivation and resilience to account for the intersecting identities and experiences of BOCS.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offered significant insights into the perceptions of unmet needs among BOCS during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through an exploration of their lived experiences, the study confirmed the crucial role of social support, self-worth, and purpose in academic achievement among this population. Despite the challenges exacerbated by the pandemic, BOCS demonstrate resilience and motivation to persist in their educational goals.

The findings underscored the necessity of tailored support mechanisms and equitable resource allocation to address the diverse needs of BOCS. Acknowledging and addressing these needs could promote positive social change and foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students. Institutions must recognize the

unique challenges faced by BOCS and implement strategies to support their academic success and well-being effectively. This study highlighted the importance of intersectional approaches to education, considering the complex interplay of factors such as race, SES, and access to resources. By understanding and addressing these intersecting challenges, institutions could create more equitable and accessible educational environments that benefit all students.

Moving forward, policymakers, educators, and administrators need to consider the implications of this research in shaping policies and practices that support the needs of BOCS. Further research is warranted to delve deeper into the specific interventions and strategies that can effectively address the challenges identified in this study. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term effects of the pandemic on the academic persistence and success of BOCS. Ultimately, the key takeaway is that by prioritizing the needs of marginalized student populations and implementing targeted interventions, institutions can contribute to positive social change and ensure that all students have the shared potential to thrive academically and personally, regardless of their background or circumstances. In essence, the positive social implications of this study include promoting inclusivity, supporting academic success and well-being, challenging systemic inequalities, and fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education and society.

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