

**How Black Male Occupational Therapy Students Persisted to Degree Attainment: A
Narrative Inquiry**

Dissertation-in-Practice Manuscript

Submitted to National University

Sanford College of Education

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

by

KIMBERLY JANELL SIMPSON

San Diego, California

September 2025

Abstract

College degree attainment is a goal for many students following high school, which can lead to a higher likelihood of employment, higher earnings, and personal satisfaction. However, there are disparities among racial and gender lines for achieving a college degree. There are also racial and gender disparities in representation for healthcare professionals, including occupational therapy practitioners, which has a negative impact on healthcare outcomes. The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a predominantly White institution. Harper's anti-deficit achievement framework for research of color in STEM and Goings' black male adult learner success theory are used to frame the concept of degree achievement for Black males. Seven Black males who graduated with a degree in occupational therapy shared their stories through a one-on-one Zoom interview. The data were analyzed using narrative analysis. The findings of the study showed how their experiences of the participants viewed through the lens of their past, present, and future, their personal and social conditions, and their description of place, impacted their success as students and professionals in occupational therapy. Narrative threads of resilience, belonging, systems of support, and diversity and representation emerged. The implications for practice impact occupational therapy programs and workplace settings, and calls for the development of targeted strategies to enhance the experiences and successes of Black males in occupational therapy.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank everyone who has supported and encouraged me in this journey. I am grateful for my family, friends, and church family who understood the sacrifice, hard work, and dedication required for this dream to become a reality. I would not have made it this far if it had not been for the Lord, to whom I give all the glory. I especially want to thank my daughter Deborah, my husband Willie, my mother Ja'Near, my brother McComma, III, my sister Katrice, and my best friend April. This manuscript is dedicated in loving memory to my Dad, who encouraged me to pursue my doctorate, and to pursue every goal I have. He always supported me with love and wise counsel. Dad, I did it!

Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions	5
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Definitions of Key Terms	7
Review of the Literature	8
Ethical Assurances	25
Summary	26
Section 2: Methodology and Design.....	28
Design and Method	28
Population and Sample	34
Materials/Instrumentation	36
Data Collection and Analysis.....	37
Assumptions.....	39
Limitations	39
Delimitations.....	39
Summary	40
Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations	42
Findings.....	42
Evaluation of the Outcomes.....	54
Implications and Recommendations for Practice	59
Recommendations for Future Research	63
Conclusions.....	64
References.....	66
Appendices.....	74
Appendix A Consent Form	75
Appendix B Interview Protocol	77
Appendix C Non-Disclosure/Confidentiality Agreement.....	81

List of Tables

Table 1 Participant Demographic Data	43
Table 2 Diversity and Representation in Academic Program	54

Section 1: Foundation

College degree attainment is a goal for many students following high school. According to Ottley and Ellis (2019), “a college degree increases the likelihood of employment, future earnings, and personal satisfaction” (p. 1). However, there are disparities among racial and gender lines for achieving this goal (Scott & Sharp, 2019). Black males face many challenges in the pursuit of their educational goals (Brooms, 2021). The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that lead to successful attainment of a college degree for Black males. Specifically, the purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI.

Resilience is a topic often discussed in research literature as it relates to academic success. The conversations expand when examining this characteristic as it relates to Black male students (Gazley & Campbell, 2020). While there may not be a universal definition of resilience (Caporale-Berkowitz et al., 2022), resilience is generally described as the ability to come back or bounce back from adversity or challenges. One’s resilience may be due to characteristics either within oneself, or that exist within one’s external contexts. For example, persons that experience trauma may show academic resilience, but not social resilience (Caporale-Berkowitz et al., 2022). Authors of one study explored the role of resilience when Black males face both internal and external challenges such as racial profiling, racial and academic stereotyping, and racial microaggressions (Brooms, 2021). Gazley and Campbell (2020) examined the role of racism as a stressor and how it shapes resilience. Other factors that challenge Black male student success are a lack of institutional support and campus engagement efforts that foster a sense of belonging, and negative self-beliefs and self-esteem (Jeter & Melendez, 2022). These external and internal factors can influence and shape resilience that leads to success.

A student's resilience and use of coping strategies have been described as factors of academic success (Tope-Banjoko et al., 2020). There are factors that led to success for Black males who have completed a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. Understanding what factors led to success for those graduates can potentially impact the institutional support and resources for education of students of color, the face of the profession of occupational therapy, and the consumer of healthcare services (Brown et al., 2021). Brown et al. called for additional standards to be added by the accrediting body for occupational therapy, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE), that would require that academic programs document efforts to recruit and retain underrepresented minorities. Strategies such as holistic admissions programs, mentoring programs for students and graduates, and tutoring programs are beneficial for student success (Brown et al., 2021). Connections to national organizations specifically for students of color can increase success toward degree attainment for Black men in occupational therapy education (Ford et al., 2021).

Researchers report efforts to increase diversity in the field of healthcare, including occupational therapy (Brown et al., 2021; Ford et al., 2021). Statistically, 85.1% of occupational therapy practitioners are white, and 91.1% are female (AOTA, 2023). Examining the educational experiences of Black males in occupational therapy will add to the literature on the topic, as it focuses specifically on the success of Black males in occupational therapy. Black males are needed as students and professionals of occupational therapy (Ford et al, 2021). Matthews et al. (2022) described the need for increased diversity in the healthcare delivery workforce following the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among racial minorities in the United States. When patients see providers who represent their racial/ethnic identity there is "better patient satisfaction, perceived quality of health care services received, a lower likelihood of

unmet needs, and...reduced infant mortality rates” (Matthews et al., 2022, p. 97). Jeter and Melendez (2022) reported the significant role of representation on college campuses to support enrollment and graduation of Black men. The focus of this qualitative study was not on the perceived challenges, but on the positive factors for success. Despite challenges within themselves, or within the institutional environment, many Black males successfully achieve a college degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). It is of interest to explore those factors that led to their success.

Statement of the Problem

The problem that was addressed in this qualitative narrative inquiry study were the lower rates of college degree attainment by Black males, leading to a lower earning potential (Zhou & Pan, 2023), and the low representation of Black male occupational therapy practitioners (OTP) (AOTA, 2023). There is a negative impact on healthcare delivery related to insufficient representation of Black males providing occupational therapy services (Brown et al., 2021). Black Americans achieving a minimum of a bachelor’s degree has economic, social, and political implications (Kaba, 2024). Higher education can lead to increased opportunities for employment and higher wages than those with a General Education Development (GED) certificate (Hines et al., 2019). Hines et al. linked having a college degree with needs such as access to healthcare.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), the median earnings for Blacks working full-time with bachelor’s and master’s degrees was \$50,000 and \$61,300 respectively, compared to \$35,000 with high school completion alone. Black males attain college degrees at lower rates than other racial and gender groups. The percentage of bachelor’s degrees conferred to Black males was 8.8% compared to 61% for White males and 12.9% for Asian

males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Black males earn undergraduate and graduate degrees at a significantly lower rate than Black females (Scott & Sharp, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). If this problem is not addressed, Black males could live with lower salaries, less career advancement, and decreased access to benefits such as healthcare (Hines et al., 2019), which impacts their families and communities. There is an impact on Black consumers of the healthcare system, as having a healthcare provider of color can lead to improved relations between patient and provider, and increased access to and quality of healthcare (Brown et al., 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. With the numerous challenges faced by Black males that lead to low degree attainment, it was necessary to study the strategies that lead to successful degree attainment by this population at a PWI (Gazley & Campbell, 2020). This study was unique in that it explored the perceptions of Black men who successfully achieved a degree in occupational therapy; a field where the majority of students and practitioners are Caucasian women (AOTA, 2020, p. 41). The target population was Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. IRB approval was obtained, and participants were recruited through Facebook groups with permission from group administrators. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used, with a total of seven participants obtained. A semi-structured, sixty-minute, virtual interview was conducted with each participant via Zoom. The participants of the study shared their experiences of successfully completing a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. As Black male occupational therapy practitioners they described their experiences related to diversity and representation in various

practice settings. Narrative analysis was used to analyze their stories using the temporality, sociality, and place commonplaces, and narrative threads were identified (Clandinin, 2023). Occupational therapy education programs should provide intentional and directed support to include culturally competent training for students and faculty, mentoring, and campus-based peer organizations for Black male students.

Research Questions

RQ1

How do Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI describe their experiences in obtaining their degree?

Conceptual Framework

In examining the literature related to degree achievement for Black men, studies have identified the many challenges and barriers for Black men to persist in higher education to degree attainment. Despite these challenges and barriers, Black men do graduate college with undergraduate and graduate degrees. It is through the lens of success that the author of this study explored the life stories of Black men who have completed a degree in occupational therapy. The perspective of successful degree completion correlates with an asset-based or anti-deficit perspective (Harper, 2010). To practice as an occupational therapist, new graduates must attain either a master's degree or practical doctorate degree in occupational therapy. Occupational therapy assistants now graduate with bachelor's or associate degrees. The Black male student pursuing a graduate degree or attending community college, may not be a traditional aged student (typically aged 18-24).

This research focuses on Harper's (2010) anti-deficit achievement framework for research on students of color in STEM, and Goings' (2021) black male adult learner success

theory (BMALST). Integrating these two concepts provided the perspective of the characteristics and practices that lead to success for the Black male achieving a degree in occupational therapy, specifically from a PWI, as a degree in occupational therapy is a science degree. Harper's (2010) framework has a broad diversity focus for minorities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs. Goings' (2021) theory specifically addresses those students who are non-traditional age (18-24), and it is possible that those Black male students that completed their degrees in occupational therapy did so as traditional aged students.

Guided by a deficit framework, persons who study the topic of Black males in higher education may be tempted to follow a line of inquiry that seeks to understand why Black men fail, why they achieve college degrees at lower rates than their White and Asian counterparts, and what the personal or environmental barriers are to success in higher education (Harper, 2010). Such questions may stem from reports such as those by the National Center for Education Statistics (2021) which revealed that in 2021, Black males achieved bachelor's degrees at 19.7% and master's degrees at 4.7%, compared to White males at 40.3% and 6.6% respectively, and Asian males at 69.3% and 29.5%, respectively. Harper (2010) suggested reframing the questions that have a deficit orientation, to ones that have an antideficit framing. The question becomes how did 19.7% of Black men achieve a bachelor's degree, for example, and not why are Black men trailing behind White and Asian men in bachelor's degree attainment?

Harper's (2010) framework focused on students in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) majors, which is relevant for occupational therapy, a field of applied science. Harper (2010) offers questions that may offer insight for three "pipeline points"; one being college achievement, along with pre-college socialization and readiness, and post-college persistence in STEM (Harper, 2010, p. 67-68). College achievement is the most relevant pipeline

point for the proposed study. In the college achievement pipeline, anti-deficit questions center around interactions between the student, their peers, and the faculty, both in and out of the classroom. A review of the literature also found themes indicating that institutional resources and positive peer and faculty relationships had a positive influence on successful degree attainment.

Goings (2021) described the characteristics and unique needs of the Black male adult learner. The adult learner is over the age of 24 and has one of seven life scenarios that impact higher education, including being responsible for dependents, working full-time while taking classes, and attending college part-time. The BMALST uses an anti-deficit lens and offers that success is due to both individual and environmental factors (Goings, 2021). The concepts of both the BMALST and the anti-deficit achievement framework were used to support the problem statement, and guide the problem statement and research question of this study.

Definitions of Key Terms

Microaggressions

Microaggressions may include statements or actions that are offensive and context dependent. These behaviors may be intentional or unintentional and directed toward a marginalized racial or ethnic group (Williams, 2020).

Occupational therapy

The field of healthcare where licensed occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants complete evaluations of and provide intervention that enables people of all ages to participate in daily activities (AOTA.org).

Resilience

Resilience is a person's ability to bounce back from a challenging situation. Resilience is the ability for a student to have academic success despite challenges they may experience (Brooms, 2021).

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. There are challenges that Black males face to persisting in higher education to degree attainment (Irvine, 2019). The focus of the deficit-based perspective is personal factors such as low socioeconomic status and GPA, or environmental and institutional factors such as systemic racism and low parental education. Despite these factors, Black males do complete both undergraduate and advanced degrees. In this study, I explored the stories of Black males' experience in higher education and the strategies that led to their success, which is an asset-based perspective. The benefit of the asset-based perspective is that scholars, institutions, practitioners, and students can understand the unique perspective of the Black male and can implement practices and policies that support persistence to degree attainment.

Sources for this literature review were retrieved through database searches of Roadrunner/EBSCOhost and American Journal of Occupational Therapy. Keyword searches of terms included *black male, black and male and degree completion, African American, higher education, occupational and therapy, mentor, resilience, persistence, degree and attainment, student retention, sense of belonging, and education*. The search parameters were for sources within the past 5 years, and scholarly, peer-reviewed journals.

The literature review yielded two major themes: 1) factors of success, including resilience, institutional efforts, and mentoring; and, 2) diversity and representation. Despite the

comprehensive studies on the barriers to success for the Black male in higher education, studies that focus on the facilitators of success are prevalent. There is a noted call to increase diversity in healthcare education and practices (Brown et al., 2021). There is a correlation between the faculty of color and graduates of color (Dickson & Zafereo, 2020). Retention and recruitment of occupational therapy practitioners and students of color is impacted by the lack of representation of such in healthcare and universities (Ford et al., 2021). The majority of occupational therapy students and practitioners are Caucasian cisgender females, and the literature stating the importance of representation is significant. While studies have explored the perspectives of Black males completing college degrees and identified the importance of representation in education and healthcare, there are not studies that specifically explore those experiences of Black males completing a graduate degree in occupational therapy from a PWI.

Factors of Success

The first theme developed after review of the literature is factors of success, identified as resilience, institutional efforts, and mentoring programs. Resilience is defined and described relative to its influence on students and their academic success (Caporale-Berkowitz et al., 2022). Resilience can be a predictor of success and a personal characteristic of individual students. Institutional efforts include creating a positive racial climate, creating programs and initiatives that build a sense of belonging and community for Black male students on campus, and creating pipeline programs that support students of healthcare programs. Santangelo et al. (2022) discussed peer and faculty mentoring as factors of success. Family and community support through modeling and encouragement are factors for success (Goings, 2021). These factors as described in the literature can lead to successful degree attainment for Black males.

Resilience. Discussions about resilience are prevalent in the literature related to academic success. The conversations expand when examining resilience as it relates to Black males (Gazley & Campbell, 2020). Caporale-Berkowitz et al. (2022) stated that there may not be one universal definition for resilience and resilience may mean something different for each individual, in their individual contexts. Resilience is generally described as the ability to come back or bounce back from adversity or challenges. Academic resilience describes a students' ability to succeed in spite of difficult and challenging experiences they face personally or within the academic institution (Brooms, 2021). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) developed a succinct definition of resilience for commonality of language in resilience research that states "resilience encompasses the capacity to resist, adapt to, recover, or grow from a challenge" (Brown et al., 2023, p. 6). This definition gives the unique perspective that students can not only overcome challenges or stressors, but can actually grow from them. Further, resilience can be viewed as a trait that can be developed and is malleable, not a fixed personal characteristic (Caporale-Berkowitz et al., 2022). Understanding resilience and its role in academic success will have a positive impact on successful degree attainment for Black males.

Academic success following academic challenges can be a result of one's resilience. Students that have experienced setbacks such as being placed on academic probation overcame those setbacks because of their resilience (Caporale-Berkowitz et al., 2022). Students that were resilient were able to seek, and put into practice, support resources that aided them through their academic challenges. Participants in a study conducted by Brooms (2021) noted specifically that their resilience and ability to seek help were the reason they persisted to even their third year in college. If resilient students persist to college degree attainment, they must utilize strategies that help them to persist despite academic challenges.

Resilient students use more positive coping strategies. How students approach adverse experiences builds their academic identity, and the more adaptive (positive) their approach, the more successful they are (Tope-Banjoko et al., 2020). Strategies such as acceptance of the situation and positive refocusing are coping strategies associated with resilience (Tope-Banjoko et al., 2020). A student with more maladaptive coping strategies is less likely to be academically successful (Tope-Banjoko et al., 2020). Self-handicapping behaviors which include self-sabotaging behaviors (ex. hanging out late the night before an exam), and self-blame and blaming others for failures are other examples of maladaptive coping strategies (Tope-Banjoko et al., 2020). Some authors define resilience as a necessary mechanism to cope during challenges. Gazley and Campbell (2020) explained that resilience is a successful use of coping strategies in order to proceed to a goal. For Black males that deal with societal issues that are also reflected in the campus community (such as stereotypes, racial profiling, racial microaggressions, and defense of their intellect), resilience is key to persistence (Gazley & Campbell, 2020). Gazley and Campbell (2020) stated, “those who persist, cope” (p. 361). As resilience is positively associated with adaptive coping strategies, it is of interest to understand what causes a student to be resilient.

Personal characteristics can predict resilience. Robbins et al. (2018) described four protective characteristics that can predict resilience: levels of self-esteem, experience of stressful events, maternal attachment avoidance, and paternal attachment anxiety. These characteristics can determine how a student copes with stress, or the support resources they have available and that they utilize. If a student experiences a stressful event such as failing an exam, the characteristics of resilience they use will determine if they access the resources to improve as necessary to pass the next exam. The protective characteristic of self-esteem and positive self-

belief within the student will push them to keep trying to succeed (Robbins et al., 2018). These characteristics can also push a student to keep going despite everything when there is not a strong parental attachment, or support. The student is resilient because they have nothing to gain by turning back. If resilience is not innate, fortunately, according to Helling and Chandler (2021), resilience is “teachable and learnable” (p. 162). Through resilience training, individuals can learn how to allow the challenges they face to become lessons in coping and adaptability, and opportunities for increased self-efficacy and personal growth (Helling & Chandler, 2021). This is consistent with the earlier definition of resilience by the NIH; that resilience can cause one to adapt and grow. One’s resilience may be due to personal characteristics, or due to external environmental and contextual factors.

Resilience is a personal characteristic that is influenced by environmental and contextual factors. Students may also respond differently in different situations. Persons that experience trauma may show academic resilience but not social resilience (Caporale-Berkowitz et al., 2022). It can be argued that if resilience is viewed as a personal, innate characteristic, many students may be inevitably unsuccessful in their academic pursuits. Therefore, while some studies included personal effort and personal traits as indicators of resilience, others focused on external factors that impacted resilience such as social and environmental factors of peer and family support.

Peer and family support can be a positive factor for resilience and academic success. Family support can include positive affirmations and encouragement, impact the belief that the goal can be accomplished, be a foundation on which individuals can be grounded, and be a financial support. Family support can be critical to success, as one participant in Brooms’ (2021) study noted. In addition to family support, peer support was also highly influential (Brooms,

2021). The support can be as direct as verbal encouragement and being around family and peers, or as indirect as knowing that they are there for you. Brooms studied the experiences of Black males who attended a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Though a HSI serves other students of color, there was low enrollment of Black male students on campus, and challenges specific to Black males were still evident (Brooms, 2021). Gazley and Campbell (2020) echoed how critical family support is for resilience, but also supported that a strong tie to community resources could have just as strong of an impact.

Institutional efforts. Institutional programs and initiatives can have a positive impact on retention and persistence for Black males in higher education (Long & Travers, 2021). Institutional programs and initiatives for healthcare programs such as nursing, can positively influence success for Black male students (Matthews et al., 2022). Ottley and Ellis (2019) reported that participants benefitted from an institutional retention initiative at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in many ways. The Successful M.A.L.E. Initiative program was an intentional institutional effort to increase retention and graduation for Black men. Students reported feeling supported, even if it was just to be able to sit in a room together with other Black males (Ottley & Ellis, 2019).

The impact of attending a PWI for Black males often means they are of a small number of students with unique needs due to academic factors, personal and cultural factors, and systemic racism. The themes developed from the study indicate that while Black male students expressed internal needs and obstacles (such as intrinsic motivation) to persisting in higher education, they found support through the program to develop needed skills (Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Having role models and encouragement to succeed despite barriers illustrates the necessity for such intentional retention programs, especially at a PWI.

To further the point of the importance of intentional institutional programs that cater to students of color, Long and Travers (2021) recounted their experience in the Bell Fellows Program for doctoral students of color at Ohio State University, a PWI in the Midwest. In their collaborative autoethnographic study, they shared their reflections on the benefits of a program designed to support Black males aspiring to achieve an advanced degree. Through their study, the authors determined that through participation in the program, they received peer to peer support, Black male faculty/staff mentors, financial resources, and community cultural wealth (Long & Travers, 2021). Black male students often struggle against assumptions that they are not intelligent, feeling that they must compete or work harder to prove their worth (Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Compounding such issues, doctoral students struggle with declining self-confidence and psychological well-being as they progress toward advanced degrees (Ayoobzadeh, 2023). Not only did the authors complete their PhD, but they also went on to become academic faculty at the university due to their participation in an institutional program for doctoral students of color. The importance of Black students having professors of color will be discussed further in Diversity and Representation.

Institutional retention programs can have a discipline-specific focus. Pipeline programs can increase persistence efforts, and they can help increase transition through to professional practice. Patterson et al. (2023) looked at the impact of the High School to Higher Education (H2H) Pipeline Program for students of color in nursing. Through the program, students realized how much there was to learn about the profession, and they had a space to safely traverse the experiences of racism and related stereotypes as Black men in a White female dominated profession (Patterson et al., 2023). The Urban Health Program for underrepresented minority students in nursing and other health science programs provided resources and support for

enhancing student success (Matthews et al., 2022). Such programs increase recruitment of students of color in fields that are grossly underrepresented by Black men, such as nursing and occupational therapy. While the literature addresses the value of programs and resources for students of color in health science fields, the literature fails to examine the impact of such programs for Black males earning graduate degrees in occupational therapy.

A positive racial climate on college campuses, especially PWIs, can increase the sense of community and belonging for Black males, leading to persistence to degree completion. Black males on PWI campuses experience climates of discrimination, mainly through racial microaggressions (Allen, 2020). There are assumptions that are made about the Black male (cisgender, heterosexual, athletes, unintelligent, aggressive) that lead to challenges that affect their academic, psychological, and social success attending a PWI (Allen, 2020). Racial microaggressions can also have an impact on the Black male's physical health (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2023). These factors are products of a poor racial climate, which reflect the larger societal racial climate that Black males experience. Institutions must invest in creating a positive racial climate for students of color. A positive racial climate can increase the sense of inclusion and community for Black students (Allen, 2020). In fact, a positive racial climate "increases self-efficacy, higher academic performance and overall positive effects for all students on campus" (Allen, 2020, p. 845). With the multifactorial impact of a poor racial campus climate on Black men, higher education institutions should create intentional supports and spaces that build community, inclusion, and a sense of belonging.

Institutions can support success for Black male students by fostering a sense of community on campus. Black male students struggle with feelings of belonging in higher education, especially at PWIs (Matthews et al., 2022). Belonging is a basic need, and African

American students have an increased desire for support on campus, especially at a PWI (McCall & Castles, 2020). Factors that foster a student's sense of belonging include aspects of one's campus environment (Strayhorn, 2023). Strayhorn stated that Black students' sense of belonging positively correlates with academic outcomes such as grades and persistence, and personal development such as identity. Students can feel out of place on other campuses that are dissimilar to their home communities. Black students reported that even while being at other minority serving institutions, they can feel either out of place or feel pressure to represent all Blacks (Brooms, 2021). Still, students attending institutions that create a welcoming community for students of color, whether through specific programming or directed social organizations, feel that sense of belonging.

Brooms (2021) explored the experiences of Black males who choose to attend a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Participants in the study reported that by participating in a Men of Color program on campus, they gained a "culturally engaging environment that enhanced their sense of mattering, strengthened their sense of belonging, and supported their personal and educational needs" (Brooms, 2021, p. 10). Jeter and Melendez (2022) suggested that institutions promote engagement initiatives for Black male student success. They posited that with so few Black faculty and leaders on U.S. campuses, Black male students have a harder time feeling included, and cannot relate to their professors on those campuses (Jeter & Melendez, 2022). Therefore, more targeted engagement initiatives are needed.

Mentoring programs and retention programs can increase a sense of belonging for Black men on campus. Ottley and Ellis (2019) described three factors that influence Black male retention which included environmental factors, such as sense of belonging on campus and involvement in social activities. These are similar to factors that Matthews et al. (2022) described

as extra-academic factors. The authors recommended that institutions move past academic-based issues and focus on those social, emotional, and contextual factors that can lead to persistence to degree attainment. They also included their success with intentional institutional diversity and inclusion strategies to improve retention of underrepresented minorities, including Black males. Institutional programs such as their Urban Health Program (Matthews et al., 2022), which provided resources and support for underrepresented minority students in nursing and other health sciences programs, helped to build an inherent sense of community.

College campuses that offer a sense of community can have a positive impact on student persistence to degree attainment. Strayhorn (2023) described high-impact practices that give students the opportunity to connect the academic and social aspects of their college experience, can shape a sense of belonging. These high-impact institutional practices include first-year seminars, cultural centers, and living-learning communities (LLC). Strayhorn described the effects of living-learning communities at both PWIs and HBCUs on sense of belonging for Black students. The community in living-learning communities is built through “shared experiences, language, and traditions” (Strayhorn, 2023, p. 228). Living-learning communities provide opportunities for Black students to have meaningful connections that provide academic and social support that is necessary for success in college. Bamberger and Smith (2023) highlighted the challenge first generation college students have for social integration and campus engagement and the impact of those factors on grades, degree attainment and network building. Institutions should develop strategies that are grounded in student engagement and involvement to improve persistence to degree attainment (Dorime-Williams & Choi, 2023). Goings (2021) determined that social factors such as cultivating a positive peer network on campus were factors for success. Building a peer network at a PWI may be difficult for Black males, but Goings

(2021) concluded that “Black men succeed academically when they have peers who push them to succeed, and provide support when they experience instances of racism/stereotyping” (p. 133).

Having tangible and available institutional resources for social engagement aids students in feeling connected to the campus environment, building that sense of community and belonging.

Mentoring. Researchers that focus on factors related to successful completion of undergraduate and graduate degrees for Black males, identify mentoring relationships as a positive factor (Ayoobzadeh, 2023; Santangelo et al., 2022). Mentoring is defined in the literature as a relationship between a senior organizational person (mentor) and a new organizational person (protégé or mentee), with the function of providing psychosocial support and career-related support (Ayoobzadeh, 2023). Mentoring can occur through both formal and informal avenues. The literature offers a positive correlation between mentoring efforts or programs, and academic achievement and retention of African American males in higher education. Mentoring relationships in higher education can have a multifaceted positive effect for students’ academic success and personal growth and satisfaction. Jeter and Melendez (2022) summarized the benefit of mentor relationships as leading to “reduced health-risk behavior, improved academic outcomes, social emotional wellbeing, mental health, interpersonal relationships, and racial identity” (p. 22). Mentoring in a college setting can promote “a sense of satisfaction, well-being, and increases the state of belonging” for Black males (Brewster & Ashley, 2019, p. 53). Additional studies describe the benefits and limitations of different types of mentoring relationships such as peer mentoring and student-faculty mentoring, for student success.

A mentoring relationship with faculty can aid in Black male student retention. Faculty have a significant role in student success. Black male students value faculty as institutional

supports for academic success, and personal and professional development (Brooms, 2020). Brooms (2020) developed three themes from a literature review related to student-faculty relationships. He found faculty interactions, faculty engagement with students in the classroom setting and faculty mentoring have an impact on Black male students' success. Mentoring relationships are beneficial to students for navigating the institutional processes, gaining access to opportunities, and receiving emotional support (Brooms, 2020). Black faculty members have a unique opportunity to positively affect Black students' experiences. Brooms noted that Black faculty mentors feel a responsibility for providing additional support to students that may be facing challenges with academic expectations. Goings (2021) indicated the importance of mentoring in the themes of having access to caring professors and university sponsored communities. Black male students who perceive a need for connection with faculty and other students, tend to experience greater satisfaction and persistence in college (Brewster & Ashley, 2019). Further, their study found that student engagement, mentoring, and self-efficacy positively impacted student retention (Brewster & Ashley, 2019). Studies show that students who have a faculty mentor relationship have higher GPAs, more rapid progress to degree completion, and greater retention (Santangelo et al., 2022). The literature demonstrates the correlation between mentoring relationships and positive factors for academic and psychosocial success for Black males.

Mentoring relationships can also lead to successful degree completion for Black males in STEM, and those pursuing advanced degrees. This is a relevant perspective for Black males seeking a degree in occupational therapy. Chelberg and Bosman (2019) stated that a diversified workforce requires increased access to STEM education, and identified faculty mentoring as an effective strategy for completion of a degree in STEM. Mentoring strategies can aid in

“increasing degree completion, reducing inequities for minority students, and broadening participation in the STEM pipeline and workforce” (Chelberg & Bosman, 2019, p. 40). Faculty mentor relationships can help doctoral students persist to degree completion as those students face increased isolation and decreased motivation (Ayoobzadeh, 2023).

Black males must seek out Black male faculty for a mentoring relationship, but the problem is that there are usually very few, if any Black male faculty, especially at a PWI (Goings, 2021). Black faculty at PWIs assert the importance of their racial identity with Black male students, taking a relational approach to their instruction, making sure the academic expectations are clear (Brooms, 2020). Brooms noted that in this setting, Black faculty members also provide career enhancing benefits such as writing letters of recommendation, providing career advice, and critiquing academic work. These factors are of interest to note but are an exception to specific mentoring programs designed to support Black male students. Having a faculty mentor to support the Black male through the educational process will have a positive effect, regardless of the race of the mentor. Although strategies for making these connections may differ for the traditional college aged student, and Black male adult learners (those returning to college) (Goings, 2021), the impact is still positive for persistence to graduation.

Pulling together the concepts of retention practices and mentoring, Lane (2020) suggested further research to understand the effect of peer mentoring and retention. According to Ayoobzdeh (2023), peer mentoring can be an effective socialization practice to retain doctoral students. Complemented by the benefits of faculty mentoring, peer mentoring is effective for success as it gives students a resource to share concerns and insecurities that they would not share with a faculty mentor (Ayoobzdeh, 2023). Peer mentoring was studied as part of a STEM student retention and success model, *Integrated Achievement and Mentoring (iAM)* (Santangelo

et al., 2022). In this model, mentoring was one of three essential components. Peer mentoring was part of the dynamic hierarchical mentoring model, where students enter being mentored by experienced peer mentors and members of faculty, and later become peer mentors themselves to incoming students in the STEM program (Santangelo et al., 2022). Peer mentoring programs affected both mentor and mentees positively, and helped to increase academic self-efficacy and perseverance toward educational and career goals (Santangelo et al., 2022). Though peer mentoring is supported in the literature as a strategy for student retention in STEM, studies do not explore the benefits specific to the retention of Black males in occupational therapy graduate programs.

Another aspect of mentoring in an atypical sense can be drawn from the impact of family and community support. Students that have support to navigate the resources available in college as they transition from high school persist to degree attainment. Students who have a support system that can help them navigate what Santangelo et al. (2022) described as the hidden curriculum, are aware of the academic culture, and expected college student behaviors including academic skills, use of resources, and communication with faculty. Irvine (2019) found that family support influenced college success. Even those whose parents did not attend college were motivated to success by the expectation of college success within their community. This is consistent with Going's (2021) findings of a supportive family and a positive peer network as positive indicators of success for Black male adult learners. Additionally, observing those that were successful motivated the students, and having spiritual faith increased academic success (Irvine, 2019).

Hines et al. (2019) discussed "constellation mentoring" as a facilitator of success of African American male college students (p. 59). Constellation mentoring involves a group or

cast of people that support the student in different areas, from their area of expertise. This differs from the more traditional model of one-to-one mentoring. While it is not possible to say that all Black males that have achieved a college degree had a mentoring relationship, the literature supports this as an indicator of success, along with students seeing representation of themselves in the academic and professional arenas. The contextual support of mentors or “expert others” who have traversed the path and can guide students through challenges (Gazley & Campbell, 2020), or the availability of programs and institutional resources that support students, especially students of color, is crucial.

Health science degree programs, such as nursing, have found mentoring relationships and mentoring programs to be positive factors for student success, especially students of color. Strong mentee-mentor relationships in PhD programs can impact the future of the nursing profession, including the development of nursing scientists (who add to the evidence base of practice), and nursing faculty (who influence the diversity of the student body) (Mumba et al., 2021). The authors echoed other studies that describe the benefit of the mentoring relationship, with the mentor providing support and guidance while fostering professional growth and learning (Mumba et al., 2021). Cleary et al. (2023) expressed the benefits of peer mentoring for nursing PhD students to include provision of personal and academic support, support of shared learning, and assistance with socialization to the academic environment.

Similarly, Patterson et al. (2023) described the need for support outside of academic support for nursing students transitioning into higher education from high school. Their pipeline program provided not only mentoring for participants, but financial support, and social support as Black male students face discrimination and isolation on college campuses (Patterson et al., 2023). Institutional and faculty level barriers should also be addressed (Matthews et al., 2022).

The benefits of mentoring relationships and programming as factors of success are present in the literature, however, the challenges of this strategy are of interest.

As with other studies of mentoring relationships and programs, challenges were identified in the nursing literature for these strategies. In some instances, the student mentors perceive a greater benefit from the relationship than the mentees and faculty (Cleary et al., 2023). There are limitations of availability for meetings, and other constraints of time like faculty load (Cleary et al., 2023). In order for the mentor-mentee relationship to work best, there must be a good fit of personality and communication styles between the mentor and mentee (Mumba et al., 2021). To be done well, mentoring requires time and commitment to the mentee and as well as training and experience of the mentor (Mumba et al., 2021). While the review of the literature found mentoring to be a factor of success for minority students, including Black males, and students in STEM programs and other health science majors, the literature fails to explore the perceived benefit of these strategies for Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI.

Diversity and Representation

A review of the literature yielded studies on the topic of diversity and representation of persons of color in higher education and professional practice, especially Black males in healthcare programs and professions. Professions such as occupational therapy are calling for increased diversity, equity, and inclusion in an unsure social and healthcare climate for people of color (Salvant et al., 2021). When presented with the barriers people of color face in healthcare programs and professions, it is not hard to see the challenges for persistence in higher education and the lack of diversity in healthcare professions.

In a qualitative study by Ford et al. (2021) that researched the perceived barriers and facilitators to retention and recruitment of women occupational therapy practitioners (OTP) and students of color, participants (91.7% identified as Black or African American women) identified barriers of lack of representation in and knowledge of occupational therapy, feeling like an outsider, and need of financial support as barriers. This resonates for African Americans that feel they have to prove they deserve to be in that space, whether the academic space or the professional space, where their Caucasian peers are of the predominant racial background. Facilitators were identified under the themes of connections with national organizations specifically for people of color, and individualized mentor-mentee relationships (Ford et al., 2021).

The importance of racial and gender representation in higher education was discussed in a study by Jeter and Melendez (2022). The themes of a lack of mentors and role models, a decreased sense of belonging, and institutional racism were identified as barriers for Black men in higher education pursuing degrees in education. Participants in a study of women of color in occupational therapy reported racist comments from faculty and clinical instructors including “I know how black people love their chicken” and “I’m sure you’re from the hood” (Ford et al., 2021, p. 5). Barriers such as racism are compounded for men of color, especially Black males. In educational environments, Black male students experience faculty that have little to no expectations for their academic success, who engage in racial microaggressions, and who hold Black males to stereotypical archetypes (Brooms, 2020). These examples shed light on how important it is to understand the factors that lead to successful degree completion for Black males, and progression to the profession of occupational therapy.

The impact of decreased diversity and a lack of minority representation extends beyond academic and workspaces. Brown et al. (2021) identified how these factors impact disparities in healthcare for people of color. According to Brown et al., underrepresented minorities (URM) prefer to see a healthcare professional that shares the same racial background and tend to have better healthcare outcomes when they do. Patterson et al. (2023) also reported that populations prefer to see healthcare professionals that share the same background, and that Black nurses tend to work in underserved areas, which would increase access to diverse practitioners for this population. Healthcare practitioners of color may share the same lived experiences of patients of color, and can better understand their perspective as it relates to their healthcare decision making, building a trusting relationship in the process (Patterson et al., 2023). Despite these statistics and the increasing diversity of the U.S. population, healthcare fields such as nursing (Matthews et al., 2022) and occupational therapy (Brown et al., 2021) remain racially homogenous.

Ethical Assurances

This study received approval from the National University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. Confidentiality was achieved through coding the identity of the participants in the study through the use of an identifying number. Participants were provided the confidentiality agreement (see Appendix A) during recruitment. Data were secured on a password protected personal computer. Permission was obtained from Facebook OT group site administrators to recruit participants. Documents were kept in a locked, secured area. This information will be secured for 3 years. A confidentiality agreement was developed for any transcribing services or assistance used to transcribe participant interviews, but was not necessary. A sample confidentiality agreement can be found in Appendix C. In accordance with principles of conduct for research, participants must be given the opportunity to choose what

should and should not happen to them (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Participants were notified of the nature of the study, potential risks and benefits, and a guarantee of privacy. Participants gave verbal consent of participation, which was recorded during the virtual interview.

Researcher as instrument is a term that is specific to the qualitative researcher. I acknowledge that as the researcher, I spent considerable time with the participants during interviews and during email correspondence while verifying accuracy of the generated data. Narrative inquiry researchers develop close relationships and relationship ethics are considered during the process (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). I transcribed and analyzed the data and presented the findings. In this research process I was transparent, collaborative, and reflective. The characteristics of positionality, reflexivity and researcher as instrument all require the researcher to reflect on who they are and how that identity influences the research. Strategically, I acknowledged biases and assumptions, intentionally collaborated with the participants concerning the data, and engaged in reflective activities.

Summary

For many, a college degree provides access to higher paying jobs and benefits such as healthcare. However, Black males achieve college degree attainment at lower levels than other racial groups. College degrees are also needed for higher level healthcare positions, including occupational therapy. Healthcare workers of color have a major influence on healthcare outcomes for patients of color (Brown et al., 2021). It is therefore critical that Black males persist to degree attainment in occupational therapy.

Research focuses on the barriers and challenges to the success of Black males in higher education. However, conceptual frameworks such as the anti-deficit achievement framework for

research on students of color in STEM (Harper, 2010), and the black male adult learner success theory (Goings, 2021) focus on the aspects that lead to successful degree attainment. Reframing the conversation from what is wrong with Black men, to what strategies do Black men use to succeed in college, places the Black male in a more positive light and can affect policy and engagement in college institutions. The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI.

The literature review yielded themes of factors of success, and diversity and representation. Factors of success include resilience, institutional efforts, and mentoring. The impact of diversity and representation in higher education and professional practices can have far reaching implications for successful degree completion in higher education, and healthcare outcomes for patients. Black faculty members provide Black students with personal and academic insight that is valuable to traverse the complexities of institutional culture (Brooms, 2020). To patients, Black occupational therapists share an understanding of their experiences in light of health inequities (Patterson et al., 2023). Representation matters.

Ethical assurances for confidentiality and the protection of research subjects are documented. Consent forms and confidentiality agreements were used for the protection of the research participants and their personal information and stories. Positionality, reflexivity, and role of the researcher are discussed as the researcher is the primary instrument for data generation and analysis. The researcher's biases, assumptions, and experiences are part of the research process. As these topics are thoroughly discussed, and the problem statement, purpose statement, conceptual framework, and literature review presented, the next section details the research methodology and design.

Section 2: Methodology and Design

The problem that was addressed in this qualitative narrative inquiry study were the lower rates of college degree attainment by Black males, leading to a lower earning potential (Zhou & Pan, 2023), and the low representation of Black male occupational therapy practitioners (OTP) (AOTA, 2023). The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. With the many challenges faced by Black males that lead to low degree attainment, it was necessary to study the strategies that led to successful degree attainment by this population at a PWI (Gazley & Campbell, 2020).

In this section I described the design and method for the proposed study. An explanation for the rationale of the chosen design and method will be provided, including why alternative designs and methods were noted to be less appropriate. A description of the population and sample, materials and instrumentation, and data collection and analysis methods will be explained. The section ends with a description of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

Design and Method

Given the problem statement, purpose statement, and research question, the appropriate methodology for the study was qualitative research. Qualitative research has several characteristics that support its use for the proposed study. Qualitative research involves studying the meaning people assign to their experiences within the context of the real world (Yin, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explained that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have construed about their lives, as that is how they make sense of the world

they live in. Qualitative research was an appropriate method to explore the experiences of Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI.

Qualitative research involves the researcher in the process, which is quite distinct from quantitative research. The researcher is the primary instrument to collect and analyze data in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The benefits of the researcher being the instrument are that the researcher can collect both verbal and nonverbal data from the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher can also process and interpret data immediately, checking for accuracy and clarity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Yin (2016) described listening as an attribute, where the researcher uses auditory and visual skill as an observer in qualitative research. Yin also acknowledged the biases and shortcomings inherent in the human instrument, and that these subjectivities must be made clear, as they may shape data collection.

Qualitative research uses words and pictures as data to represent the perspectives of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell reported the rich descriptions involved in qualitative research, including descriptions of the participants and the context. Yin (2016) explained that qualitative research is descriptive and happens in the participant's natural setting. The researcher uses quotations from the data to add rich description of the narrative. The stories of Black males who have completed a degree in occupational therapy can be conveyed through words and texts, making qualitative research an accurate method for the study, compared to quantitative research.

Quantitative research is based on the collection of numerical data to test assumptions about an event or phenomenon and can include methods such as lab experiments and simulations (Wienclaw, 2021). In quantitative research, facts are proven through objective observations and measured in a controlled environment (Wienclaw, 2021). Quantitative research is focused on

numbers, not descriptions of personal experiences. Quantitative research designs may include randomized control trials and cohort studies (Chalmers & Cowdell, 2021). Personal stories and explanation of personal experiences are not acceptable in quantitative research, and a clear breach of data objectivity. The researcher does not collaborate with the test subjects in quantitative research, as in qualitative studies. In quantitative research, the test area is controlled, whereas qualitative research happens in the field where many variables can influence the process. Qualitative research is an inductive process where concepts are built, and quantitative research is a deductive process to test hypotheses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Quantitative methodology does not align with the research problem, purpose, and research question.

The chosen research design for the qualitative study was narrative inquiry design. Narrative inquiry involves the study of narrative, or “the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). People tell stories to help make sense of their experiences and the world around them, and to communicate with others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Narratives or stories focus on human experience, are a fundamental structure of human experience, and have a holistic quality (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) described the self-narration process as living, telling, retelling, and reliving one’s story. Narrative inquiry is described as a collaborative endeavor that involves mutual storytelling (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Telling, or storytelling generates data such as personal stories, but can also be photographs, personal journals, or other artifacts (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Storytelling is the main method of narrative inquiry based on telling (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

There are three major elements of narrative inquiry. In temporality, the participant is described with a past, present, and future (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In this study, Black

males described their past experience as a student in school studying occupational therapy at a PWI, how that experience influences their current perspective as an occupational therapy practitioner, and what actions they may take in the future. Sociality in narrative inquiry considers the personal and social conditions of the individual at the same time (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Personal conditions such as hopes, feelings, and desires are factored with social conditions such as environment and existential conditions, giving context to the experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Another dimension of sociality is the relationship between the inquirer and the participant (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The third element is place. These are the specific physical boundaries where the inquiry takes place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Specificity of location is crucial to describe, though inquirers or researchers may struggle with the impact of specificity on generalizability (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Place may relate to temporality when a sequence of places is described. Black males telling their stories may detail the educational environment as part of the past, their current place of employment in the present, and their community setting as a detail of the future. Connelly and Clandinin suggested consideration for the impact of the location of the interview when describing place.

The collaborative relationship between the participant and researcher is a hallmark of this design. This relationship builds a greater trust between researcher and participant, causing the participant to share even deeper detail about their experiences (Haydon & van der Riet, 2016). In studies where telling is the focus of the study, empathy and closeness develops between the researcher and participant as the researcher shares similar experiences with the participant (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explained the importance of building trust, and that negotiating entry into the field can be an ethical matter, and how it is done can help build a connected relationship between the researcher and participant.

Collaboration happens throughout the relationship, and the researcher and participant consult over the collected data to develop points of importance in the revised story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Relationship ethics are considered due to this relationship, as it is important that the participant agrees with how their experiences are represented in the research text (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This made narrative inquiry the most appropriate design choice to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI.

Narrative inquiry was the optimal design choice for the study. The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. Through the telling of stories, the influence of the experience is captured, not just the outcome (Haydon & van der Riet, 2016). Storytelling helps us understand an individual's experience through the lens of temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The choice of narrative inquiry aligns with the problem of Black males' low degree attainment. The purpose of the study in sharing the experiences of Black males who did achieve a degree, specifically in occupational therapy and, the open-ended research question concerning the stories and experiences of achievement of this population of individuals further prove alignment of the method and design.

Another possible design option considered was case study method research. Case study method involves studying a case, which can be an individual, a population, an institution, or an event, identified and explored within certain parameters (or bounded system). Stake (1978) wrote that in case study method, "boundaries are kept in focus" (p. 7). What happens and does not happen within that specific case is what composes the study. There are similarities in narrative inquiry and case study or case method research. Both seek to understand a phenomenon, both use

rich description, and both use the researcher as the instrument for data collection. The focus of the case study is not the topic under investigation, but a specific bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Analysis of data in case study research involves breaking down and dissecting the data to find themes or trends. While narrative inquiry data is also analyzed, the narrative is analyzed as “a ‘whole’ seen from temporal, social and spatial perspectives” (Haydon & van der Riet, 2016, p. 86). The stories of the case subject are not the focus in case study method. The approach of the narrative inquiry research is a better fit to capture the stories of Black males, and the influences of their experiences as a whole.

Other qualitative methods are phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory. Though similar to case study and narrative inquiry, phenomenology was not the best choice for the study. The distinction that made phenomenology an inappropriate design choice was that the researcher’s focus is on making meaning of the phenomenon itself, and giving structure to the experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher is searching for the essence of the person’s experience which may lead the reader to connect emotionally with the experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study did not look to make meaning of the problem of low college degree attainment by Black males or the success of those that did achieve a degree. Ethnography was not an appropriate choice as the researcher must be immersed in the everyday lives of the participants to better understand the group or culture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As the study explored the experiences of those that have already graduated, the participants are spread throughout many areas, and not at a specific location. And finally, the goal of grounded theory research is to develop a theory grounded in the data that is gathered and analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The purpose of the study was not to develop a new theory, but to

explore the shared experiences of Black males who have achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI.

Population and Sample

The population for the study included any Black male that has achieved a degree in occupational therapy. The target population for the study any Black male that achieved a degree in occupational therapy or occupational therapy assisting from a PWI in the United States. In AOTA's (2022) Academic Program Annual Report for Academic Year 2020-2021, 6% of students enrolled in master's programs and 5% of students enrolled in doctoral programs identified as Black/African American. In the same report, AOTA (2022) reported 10% of students enrolled in master's programs identified as male, and 8% of students enrolled in doctoral programs identified as male. These data do not indicate the actual number of graduates from these programs.

Black males that completed a master's degree or doctoral degree in occupational therapy from a PWI are appropriate for inclusion in the study. Those who achieved a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy or an associate's degree in occupational therapy assisting are also appropriate. The problem that was addressed in this qualitative narrative inquiry study were the lower rates of college degree attainment by Black males, leading to a lower earning potential (Zhou & Pan, 2023), and the low representation of Black male occupational therapy practitioners (OTP) (AOTA, 2023). There is a negative impact on healthcare delivery related to insufficient representation of Black males providing occupational therapy services (Brown et al., 2021). The minimum entry level into practice for an occupational therapist as of 2007 is the master's level, therefore, the population and sample include Black males that have achieved a graduate degree in occupational therapy. Black males who achieved a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy

prior to 2007 were also included. Additionally, Black males who achieved an associate's degree in occupational therapy assisting were included in the sample. The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. The population is appropriate to address the problem and purpose statements.

For the qualitative study, purposeful sampling was an appropriate sampling method. In purposeful sampling, a sample is chosen that has the characteristics of the population that are important to answering the research question. Purposeful sampling is a nonprobability method that allows selection of participants that are knowledgeable and experienced in the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). The target population is Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI in the United States. The study sample included Black males who achieved a graduate or undergraduate degree in occupational therapy from a PWI, who are members of occupational therapy Facebook groups. The purposeful sampling method allowed for subjective selection of participants from the target population whose stories provided rich data for the study. Snowball sampling was an appropriate method following purposeful sampling methods. Snowball sampling involves asking recruited respondents to refer other who meet the study criteria, especially with hard-to-reach populations (Ting et al., 2025). In qualitative narrative inquiry research, smaller sample sizes are common, and variables related to homogeneity versus heterogeneity can be considered in selecting the sample size (Palinkas et al., 2015). For this study, seven participants were selected.

The first step in the sampling process after the target population has been determined was to identify inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria initially included any Black cisgender male that completed a graduate degree in occupational therapy from a PWI in the

United States. Starting in 2007, a master's degree became the requirement for entry to the field as an occupational therapist, changing from a bachelor's degree. Inclusion criteria was expanded to include any Black male who achieved a degree in occupational therapy. Exclusion criteria included any Black male who did not meet the inclusion criteria. The next step in the sampling process was to implement the recruitment plan to identify Black males that meet the inclusion criteria. This information was obtained by contacting occupational therapy groups via social media. Contact was made to Facebook group site moderators for the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), Michigan Black Occupational Therapy Caucus, National Black Occupational Therapy Caucus, Michigan Occupational Therapy Association, Eastern Michigan Alumni Association, BIPOC OTP, Occupational Therapy Research Network, and Occupational Therapy Community for permission to recruit participants through their groups. Groups that were contacted by email included Michigan Black Occupational Therapy Caucus, National Occupational Therapy Caucus, BROTHAS, and the Black occupational therapy caucuses for New York and Florida. Recruitment materials were posted to my personal Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn pages. Potential participants contacted me via email, and I responded via email to introduce the study, explain the data collection procedure, and schedule an interview. After exhaustive recruitment efforts, eight participants were selected for participation in the study, and seven participants were interviewed after one participant cancelled the interview on two occasions.

Materials/Instrumentation

The data source for this narrative inquiry study included individual interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, and scheduled to last 60 minutes. The interview questions were developed from the themes in the literature review and the research question. The themes in the

literature review are factors of success (resilience, mentoring, and institutional efforts), and diversity and representation. The questions were open ended, which allowed participants to express their thoughts thoroughly, and the interviewer had flexibility to probe the participants with a less structured format. In narrative inquiry research, more than one interview may be needed to follow up on the data collected from the initial interview, and to confirm accuracy on the interpretation (Finlay & dela Cruz, 2023). The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection in narrative inquiry research is described as data generation (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Before data generation began, approval was attained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were recruited from Facebook groups for the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), Michigan Black Occupational Therapy Caucus, National Black Occupational Therapy Caucus, Michigan Occupational Therapy Association, Eastern Michigan Alumni Association, BIPOC OTP, Occupational Therapy Research Network, and Occupational Therapy Community. Site permission was obtained from the administrator of each of the Facebook groups. Interviews are the data source for the study. The interviews were recorded through the record feature in Zoom meetings. The recordings were set to automatically save to the cloud for the researcher's Zoom account, then downloaded onto the laptop computer of the researcher, which is more secure than cloud storage. Each participant's identity was coded with an alphanumeric identifier in preparation for data analysis.

Step 1. The first step in narrative analysis is to compile and organize the data generated from the participant interviews (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This was accomplished by transcribing every individual interview recording. These transcripts, or field texts, as Connelly

and Clandinin described them, are essential to the process. The interviews were transcribed through the transcription feature in Zoom. Then, I reviewed each transcript by hand while rewatching the recorded interview. This allowed me to become more familiar with the data.

Step 2. The field texts were analyzed using the three narrative inquiry elements to retell the participants' stories. The narratives were described through the dimension of temporality (through the past, present and future lens); the sociality dimension (the personal and social aspects of both the participant and researcher); and the place dimension (describing the place or sequence of places where experiences occurred) (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Through the temporality commonplace, the researchers use a temporal lens to attend to the past, present and future of the people, places, things, and events being studied (Clandinin, 2023). Analysis through the temporality lens is attending to someone else's experience, as well as our own experience (Clandinin, 2023). According to Clandinin (2023), the sociality commonplace in narrative inquiry is used to attend to the social and personal conditions of the participant. Social conditions are the cultural, social, institutional, and familial conditions that give context to the experiences and stories of the participant (Clandinin, 2023). The place commonplace is where the researcher, through the stories of the participants, describes the place or sequence of places where the events of their narratives took place. The places in the participants' stories not only provide a context for the events, but places shape the participants themselves (Clandinin, 2023).

Step 3. The retelling of participants' stories, as described in step 2, becomes the research texts (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The research texts were sent to the participants with a request to review in collaboration with the participant to ensure the text was an accurate representation of their experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Collaboration with the

participants is a key component of narrative analysis to ensure accuracy of the captured story. The texts were then analyzed for narrative threads.

Assumptions

One assumption of the study was that there are Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. It was assumed that those same Black males were willing and interested in sharing their experiences. It was assumed that the participants would openly and honestly answer the interview questions and participate in any follow-up requests. It was assumed that the sample method would yield participants that meet the inclusion criteria. It was assumed that the participants have access to the Internet and have a working knowledge of virtual platforms such as Zoom and social media platforms such as Facebook.

Limitations

There were limitations to the study. The participants were solely recruited via social media which may have limited potential participants to those who are active on Facebook. The small sample size is also a limitation as it does not represent a broad perspective of the population. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the study at any time without cause.

Delimitations

There are certain considerations that delimit the scope of the proposed study. Black males in occupational therapy were chosen as the focus of the study due to low rates of people of color in the female dominated profession of occupational therapy. Because of low representation of people of color and males in occupational therapy, the population intentionally included any Black male with a degree in occupational therapy, without limiting the date of degree conferment or the region of the country where they lived. This was done to ensure a sufficient population

from which to draw a sample. Another decision related to the tone of the research problem. The decision was made to focus on the stories of the participants without suggesting that they faced challenges to successful completion of their degrees. The research question was reframed from asking about barriers and challenges to degree attainment, to only seeking their stories from their perspective.

Summary

Qualitative research methodology was the most appropriate choice for the research study and is aligned with the research problem, purpose statement, and research question. Qualitative researchers explore the experiences of populations and the meaning they make of those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Narrative inquiry was the most appropriate research design. In narrative inquiry, researchers collect the stories or narratives of others. Narrative inquiry involves the living, telling, retelling, and reliving of an individual's story, and storytelling is the outcome of the telling (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Quantitative research methodology does not collect stories or narratives and was not an appropriate choice. Other qualitative research methods have similarities to narrative inquiry but were not the most appropriate choice to explore the stories of Black males who have graduated with a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI.

The sample of the target population of Black males that graduated with a degree in occupational therapy or occupational therapy assisting from a PWI in the United States were recruited using Facebook groups. After approval from the IRB and consent received from participants, data were generated through individual interviews using Zoom. The interview questions were developed from the themes in the literature review (factors of success and

diversity, and representation). A follow-up interview was offered, and email correspondence was sent to ensure accuracy of the data. All participants' identities were coded for confidentiality.

Data analysis in qualitative research can be overwhelming as the process begins in gathering and organizing the generated data. Once the data were reviewed, transcribed, and notated, they were analyzed using the three narrative inquiry elements of temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The stories were further analyzed to determine narrative threads cross the stories and were developed in the final research texts (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This section concludes with acknowledgement of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

The problem that was addressed in this qualitative narrative inquiry study were the lower rates of college degree attainment by Black males, leading to a lower earning potential (Zhou & Pan, 2023), and the low representation of Black male occupational therapy practitioners (OTP) (AOTA, 2023). The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. With the many challenges faced by Black males that lead to low degree attainment, it was necessary to study the strategies that led to successful degree attainment by this population at a PWI (Gazley & Campbell, 2020). In this section I will describe the findings of the data collected, the stories of Black males who have achieved a degree in occupational therapy or occupational therapy assisting from a PWI. The analysis of the data and criteria for trustworthiness will be presented. The evaluation of the findings will be presented. This section will conclude with the implications of the study and recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research. Factors that may influence the interpretation of the results are the small sample size of seven participants for the study, and two of the participants were students in the same academic program cohort.

Findings

Participants in this study are Black males that achieved a degree in occupational therapy or occupational therapy assisting from a PWI. The institutions that they attended varied from urban to rural, public to private, and large to small. The seven participants were individually interviewed during a virtual interview on Zoom. Three of the participants hold doctoral degrees in occupational therapy, three participants hold a master's degree in occupational therapy, one participant holds a Bachelor of Occupational Therapy degree, and two participants hold an

associate's of occupational therapy assisting degree (one doctoral degree holder also holds an associate's degree). All participants currently practice as occupational therapy practitioners in various settings, with experience ranging from 1-23 years. The participants were assigned numbers to protect their identities and ensure confidentiality. A demographic summary is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Participant	Age Range	OT Degree	Type of Institution	Years in OT Practice
P1	30-40	Associate's degree; Doctoral degree	Private for-profit community college; small, rural, private university	4 years
P2	40-50	Doctoral degree	Small, rural, private university	1 year
P3	30-40	Doctoral degree	Rural, private university	5 years
P4	40-50	Master's degree	Large, urban public university	13 years
P5	40-50	Bachelor's degree	Large, public university	23 years
P6	40-50	Associate's degree	Urban, public community college	9 years
P7	30-40	Master's degree	Large, urban public university	4 years

During the one-hour interview, demographic information was obtained. Participants were emailed a copy of their transcript for review to check for accuracy of their story.

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is a necessary goal so that the reader can have confidence in the researcher's report of the data (Stahl & King, 2020). Four essential

elements comprise the concept of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024). Credibility refers to how congruent the findings are with reality (Stahl & King, 2024). Credibility was addressed through member checking. The participants were asked to review the transcript that was generated from their Zoom interview to make sure that it accurately reflected what they said. Member checking ensured the participants' stories were accurately represented without the researcher's perceptions. The second element for trustworthiness is transferability.

Transferability refers to how well a study's findings can be applied to different contexts or situations (Ahmed, 2024). For this study, thick description was used to describe the settings of the various contexts of the participants stories, such as the classroom environment and demographics of the cohort. Thick description of the participants' stories adds fullness and complexity to the data, which helps the reader's to determine relevance and applicability to their situation (Ahmed, 2024).

The third element for trustworthiness is dependability. Dependability refers to how reliable the research findings are over time, and the transparency of the research process (Ahmed, 2024). One strategy for dependability is an audit trail. The audit trail provides a clear and detailed path of the process, which will make it possible for others to reproduce the study (Ahmed, 2024). The process and procedures for this study were documented in a notebook. Communications for scheduling interviews with participants are documented through email communication. The interview protocol is documented, and the interviews were conducted virtually and recorded to the cloud. Transcripts and notes can be provided to other researchers as part of the audit trail.

The last criterion for trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability refers to the understanding that the data and findings of the research are unaffected by any biases of the researcher and are objective (Ahmed, 2024). A strategy for confirmability is journaling and reflexivity. These activities allow the researcher to document their thought processes throughout the research process, and document and acknowledge their biases, influences, and perceptions in a transparent way (Ahmed, 2024). Following each interview, I completed a journal entry to reflect on the discussion and how the participants' stories and experiences impacted me, the similarities or differences to my experiences, and the implications of their stories for others. During review of the transcripts, I noted additional insights I gained and further acknowledged my perceptions of their experiences.

Research Question 1

How do Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI describe their experiences in obtaining their degree?

Narrative Analysis

Step 1. The first step in the narrative analysis was to compile and organize the data generated from the participant interviews. Each Zoom recording generated a transcript of the audio data. The transcript for each participant was downloaded to a password protected computer, then printed as a paper document. Each participant was given an alphanumeric code which was placed as the first sheet of each transcript. Each transcript was read and re-read to make corrections for errors in interpretation of words by the Zoom software (for example, "blackmail" instead of "Black male"). The transcripts were read and re-read with considerations for the narrative commonplaces and narrative threads, which were underlined and notated. Common experiences or narrative threads on a page were marked with a color-coded tab.

Step 2. The stories of the participants were analyzed using the three narrative inquiry elements of temporality, sociality, and place. To complete this process, I reviewed each concept again in depth, exploring the definitions and experiences of temporality, sociality, and place. I re-read aspects of each transcript through the lens of each commonplace. I identified experiences within the participants' stories that illustrate each element. The explanation of each commonplace below is followed by examples from the participants' stories.

Temporality

Through the temporality lens, participants shared aspects of their experience over the time of their attendance in universities and colleges, and how that impacted their success. They also shared their experiences related to their time of life, past experiences, and goals for the future.

P1 shared how being on dialysis affected time to class.

So, I was on peritoneal dialysis, which is where I hook up every night for ten hours, but I didn't let that affect, you know, me getting to class, being present. They work with me when it came to my doctor's appointments, and being flexible, I never had that problem. Problem I had was something may happen. My, you know, malfunction in my machine. I may be 5 minutes late, 10 minutes late, right? But other students may be late frequently, but when I'm late, it's being spoken about or addressed in [front of] the classroom. That happened several times, which you know at the end of the day, I'm professional, so no problem. I'll work on that, you know, if I have to do this or get up earlier or get hooked up earlier...like it was like almost to where if someone was getting coffee and was late it wouldn't be a problem. But if I was coming in, walking in the door, not on time, then there was a problem.

P2 described experience of being a student twice the age of his classmates.

It's tough being a 44 year old Black male having gone through a lot of experience that you had to go through especially being in a rural community in North Carolina and then getting to a place where you're in an environment with a lot of classmates who are technically and literally half your age, and you're still seeing a lot of the aspects that, you know, were very problematic even whenever I was their age...just coming out of, you know, undergraduate school. So I kinda knew what to expect, but I also did not anticipate it being what it was, because you know, again, there's only 3 males in our class, so that allowed for another 22 folks, you know, 22 females, and again, 20 were white women. They already come with predisposed judgements, and you know, they're all coming from rural areas. And so, you know, it was tough going in knowing that I had more wisdom, I had more experience, I had this knowledge and things that I can draw from, and it seemed like that at every turn I was still having to prove myself worthy.

P4 related that after an injury on his job he shifted careers toward occupational therapy and being an older student in his cohort.

So, during that time of kind of like a time of self-reflection, is this job I want to do for the rest of my life? How do I feel where I want to go? Religion, all of that took a play and made me understand I need to do something different [with] my life. But then, because I was off, I said, I want to go back to school. I was older so I didn't necessarily feel like because me being African American was a difference. I just felt my age was more of a factor than anything like that. I was actually in my first quarter, and I was voted class president with the first cohort.

P6 described not being able to work during his time in school because of the time requirements as a student and the support system that fostered his success.

One of the barriers I had was just time to study. You know, it was a lot of assignments, a lot of projects. I just made myself available, more available and that was like not being able to work and just believing that, you know, I'd be able to make it through it one way or the other. I had support. My wife was there to support me. So, me not being able, not working was okay, it worked out. But I was depleting, you know, everything that I had saved up to. I just make myself more available so that I can have time to study, have time to read 20 chapters, papers, and projects, all of those things that was required to meet the requirements to pass through, get through the program.

P7 shared his past experience that led him to occupational therapy:

I had the opportunity to start my journey at a community college, and from the community college I kind of wasn't too sure what I wanted to do, and I thought physical therapy. However, while kind of pursuing that degree towards physical therapy, I was taking some classes, and I was like, I don't really know if this is exactly what I want to do. Is there anything related to physical therapy? And then I found occupational therapy. [After shadowing an occupational therapist at a traumatic brain injury center] I was like, oh my goodness, you've seen the impact that you have on patients and their families lives. I was like I really want to do that. So, it just was from that experience, just seeing how impactful OTs were, I was like, yes, I would love to make a career out of that.

Sociality

The participants' stories are rich with personal and social context that shape the telling of their experiences. The stories offer insight into the experience of being a Black male student at a PWI, some who faced racism, academic failure, medical issues, financial strain, and lack of confidence in their educational performance.

P3 on the how the cultural dynamics of the institution influenced his educational experience:

I came from the total opposite of the PWI. So, I was used to a culture that was diverse. I was used to having teachers who were Black, White, Hispanic, teachers who knew Spanish and various languages, various religions, and then to go to a PWI, where their focus and their curriculum was not so much focused on the mass population, but focused on folks within their state, which was White. Their curriculum, when it came to addressing skin care or leisure, specifically addressed typical leisure that was apparent in their area versus a global perspective. Despite the fact that they attracted a global audience and a global cohort. It affected my learning experience because I had to advocate more for the fact that I was different.

P4 shared his experience as the only Black occupational therapist working with persons from a different culture and their views of Black persons:

I've worked with some Indian counterparts who said, 'You're different from Black people' and 'why are your people like that?', 'how come you chose to be an occupational therapist', 'I didn't know you had a Master's degree, how did you do that? That's not typical for your people.' Oh, I've heard quite a few things, you know, over the years.

P5 told the story of his experience as a student in full-time Fieldwork, with a Fieldwork supervisor who was a white male, and patient population that was predominantly White:

We do the chart review. This lady had just had a brain surgery... We're gonna go in, get her up to the evaluation. I walk in and you know I'm introducing myself... I say hello, I'm [name], I'm a student. Before I get to say the next thing, he says, 'excuse me out in the hallway right now.' I'm like 'oh, okay,' I get in the hallway, he said, 'that will not be tolerated.' I said, 'what won't be tolerated, what did I do?' He said, 'you're speaking to

her in a sexual tone, and that will not be tolerated here.’ And I said, ‘oh wow!’ He said, ‘when you go back in, you need to raise your voice higher and not have it low.’ And I was like, ‘wow, this is gonna be a long Level II.’

Place

The participants’ stories gave description to the place where events happened that shaped their stories, giving context to their campus experiences, classroom experiences, and workplace experiences. When asked how the cultural or racial dynamics of the institution influenced his educational experience, P4 shared impact of having a predominant number of African American faculty versus the predominantly Caucasian classmates. He shared the impact of place in this manner:

My program director was African American, so we had different seminars and things on like hair, and what hair meant to every culture, and then she’d do a round robin about hair. And then she had that song by India Arie, ‘I am not this skin, I’m beautiful, you know, I am not my hair, I’m wonderful, you know. So that was an eye opener for a lot of students, so it was kind of an educational class for our cohort.

P2 conveyed after two years of dealing with comments from classmates reflecting society stereotypes of Black people and other microaggressions in the classroom environment in his doctoral program, and not receiving support from the program administration, he was finally directed to officers for DEI and Belonging and Inclusion:

He was our chief DEI person, but he pretty much was the first one that we were saying we gotta go to somebody and someone suggested him, and we went to him, and he was like ‘y’all should have known about me once you stepped on the campus.’ We didn’t hear his name until like that third year. It was him and ...chief officer of belonging and

inclusion. So the two of them were almost like side by side and they ended up kind of being there for us whenever we had any kind of situation...And so it was actually good to have someone to finally talk to who's outside of the program, both of them being Black men, you know, could easily see our frustration and where we were coming from.

P7 voiced his experience related to the impact of diversity and representation as a Black male occupational therapist:

Fortunately, I actually work in Detroit, and I have the opportunity to work with a predominantly African American clientele population. And I am able to sort of read patients a bit better than my coworkers who are not African American just based on, just how you know the culture. It's a cultural difference sometimes. I'm able to use my different. You know the fact that I'm a therapist of color to my advantage because it helps me sort of read the patients better as well as connect.

Step 3. The retelling of the stories, after further analysis of the transcripts and in collaboration with the participants checking for accuracy of their stories, become research texts. These texts and stories were reviewed, and narrative threads were identified. A chart was created that listed common threads and the participants who mentioned similarities in their stories. These narrative threads included belonging, resilience, institutional support, personal support systems, racial culture, faculty and staff relationships, and representation. These threads were further categorized into overarching narrative threads of Resilience, Belonging, Systems of Support, and Diversity and Representation.

Resilience

When asked how they thought resilience impacted their success, participants described their experiences. P1 expressed,

When you talk about resiliency, it's about getting up and coming back the next day, you know. And figuring out what you did wrong, and correct it next time. That's it. There's nothing more to do. We can't weep about it. Brush your shoulders off and let's go. That's my mentality.

P2 stated,

You can't just quit. You can't give up. So, I feel like through a lot of my life experiences I've just had moments to where, you, I had to be resilient. So, it's always been a part of me. I've seen it, you know with both my parents providing for [us]. We never really had a lot, but you know there was a lot of love. There was a lot of support, so all that also goes into being able to remain resilient, remain committed, remain faithful.

Similarly, P3 stated,

It has helped me bounce back or maintain success because I realize that despite whether or not people had liked me, or whether or not I was welcomed, that there was a big space for OT. That I was going to make a difference for people who were like me. That I wanted to mentor students who were going to go through the similar experiences that I was going through and so that helped push me.

Belonging

A narrative thread that was reflected in the participants' stories was that of belonging. Participants shared stories about their experiences of feeling isolated from their peers, feeling like an outsider, lacking confidence in their ability to persist in their programs, and experiencing racial stereotypes. P1 described the need to debrief with the other two Black males in his cohort, "we would complain that there's no one that looks like us to talk to about what we go through every day". P4 felt like a "chameleon" having to change who he was in certain groups in order to

be accepted. P3 expressed pressure of feeling like “I had to represent the whole race.” Breaking into discussion or project groups within the classroom was a common scenario where the participants felt isolation. Some participants told of instances where their opinions were rejected, and ideas discredited. P5 shared “people would get off into their groups, and you were like the last one anybody wanted to work with...so I just determined in my mind...I would just study on my own.” P6 noticed not being included but didn’t consider it a challenge, “It was situations where, like study labs and like group things that they would do I feel like I wasn’t really included in...certain things like that I did recognize. But I mean it didn’t really bother me, but I did recognize it.”

Participants also shared stories of experiences that caused them to feel as though they were where they belonged. P4 talked about his OT program director, who was an African American woman, “I can’t thank that lady enough...she really went out of her way to let me know, like, you know, you are important to us.”

Systems of Support

Participants shared the support systems that influenced their success through to degree completion. Support systems such as family were an important aspect of success. P5 stated, “having a strong faith really helped me. My church family were rooting behind me. Both my parents were in the home. Neither one of my parents ever went to college, but they sent all four of us to college and they paid for it. According to P6, “my family was here”.

Diversity and Representation

Participants shared experiences of how a lack of diversity or representation impacted their success in their academic programs and professional work settings. Table 2 illustrates the makeup of the cohort in their OT degree programs:

Table 2*Diversity and Representation in Academic Program*

	Students in cohort
P1	3 Black male students
P2	3 Black male students
P3	Only Black male
P4	Only Black male
P5	Only Black male
P6	Only Black male
P7	Only Black male

Evaluation of the Outcomes

The findings of this narrative inquiry study address the problem of low degree attainment by Black males and the low representation of Black male occupational therapy practitioners (OTP). The participants have achieved various degrees in occupational therapy, from associate's degrees to doctoral degrees. They expressed in their stories their experience of being the only male, or the only Black male in their academic settings, and some told of being the only Black male in their workplace settings as OTPs. The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a degree in occupational therapy or occupational therapy assisting from a PWI. Despite the challenges they described, each participant successfully completed a degree in occupational therapy or occupational therapy assisting from a PWI.

The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on degree attainment and the academic experience of Black males seeking a degree in occupational therapy. Through their narratives, the participants contributed valuable insight on experiences in occupational therapy academic programs, and as Black male OTPs. The participants shared experiences that are consistent with Harper's (2010) anti-deficit achievement framework for research on students of color in STEM, and Goings' (2021) black male adult learner success theory (BMALST). The participants shared stories of their strategies to successfully complete their degrees, despite personal and environmental challenges. In the anti-deficit achievement framework for research on students of color in STEM, Harper (2010) frames the perspective of achievement in education around the factors that lead to success, instead of the factors that lead to failure. Participants shared examples of having poor preparation for college, having failed courses or exams within the occupational therapy program, or facing stereotypes as Black men, but also examples of the support factors that helped them persist to successful completion of their degrees. The demographics of the participants are consistent with Goings' (2021) framework. These are non-traditional aged men, some of whom were supporting families, or had to work while attending school full-time.

The findings are consistent with the major themes of the literature review, 1) factors of success, including resilience, institutional efforts, and mentoring; and, 2) diversity and representation. I will evaluate the commonalities of the findings through the lens of Clandinin's (2023) three dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place, the narrative threads, and the themes of the literature review.

Temporality

Common among several of the participants as it relates to the temporality components of past and present were characteristics of being non-traditional aged college students returning to school as a second career, or seeking a higher degree. They described how time of life played a role in their experience in occupational therapy programs. P6 shared that as a husband and father, it was a difficult decision to stop working and to be unable to contribute to his household as he used to due to the time commitment required by his studies. As older students, their experience was viewed as a deficit instead of an asset. Participants shared relevant examples of temporality in their experience of not being prepared for college academically, or having different learning needs requiring testing accommodations since K-12. These examples are consistent with the conceptual framework.

Another aspect of temporality is that of the future. When asked about ways they hoped to contribute to the field of occupational therapy, especially related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, the participants shared hopes to have an impact on the future of potential students and occupational therapy practitioners. Some spoke of being mentors and advocates for students at the university level. The future contributions also included promoting the profession through membership on advisory boards, professional development for best practices in occupational therapy, and encouraging Black men to see occupational therapy as a profession that needs them.

The responses shared by the participants reflect their perception of what they wish they had as a student or what they wish they were told as they moved into practice. However, one participant shared that he would advise students to consider a different profession. This view is not because of a lack of passion for occupational therapy, but that as a Black man working towards a PhD, and looking for more opportunities for vertical movement, occupational therapy

does not offer him the same opportunities. These aspects of temporality are also consistent with the threads of diversity and representation.

Sociality

Findings were consistent with the sociality commonplace as participants shared their stories related to social and personal conditions. Participants described the impact of support networks on campus, or the lack of such support, the importance of finding a peer group, and having a personal support system through family or faith. Some of the institutions staffed persons who held the role of diversity officer, chief, or chair, but as students, the participants were not made aware of such supports until later in their programs, after there were issues. P1 shared that there was such a need for peer support that he organized a Black Student Union graduate chapter on his campus. P7 shared that it was only by participating in a group organization of Black males from across the campus that he finally felt like he belonged, and he developed increased confidence.

Family and community support were reflected in all of the stories shared by the participants. P6 shared the importance of having the support of his wife and children through his journey. P5 shared that while he may not have had a mentor through his institution or academic program, he relied on his family and church family for encouragement. P1 participant shared the value of membership in regional and national occupational therapy groups such as AOTA which helped him keep his focus on his future aspirations. Resilience is a theme yielded through the literature review, and was a personal factor expressed by every participant. P4 and P5 shared stories of being rejected initially for admission to their OT programs, but they demonstrated tenacity to pursue their goal.

P6 shared how he was not taught how to navigate college in high school, and that everything was framed around playing a professional sport, yet his resilience impacted his success, “so for me it was like just trying to figure out everything on the fly and just not giving up, and just always just like pushing through it, no matter what.”

P1 relayed how he didn't let having a chronic illness and being on dialysis be an excuse, “so it's more of a mindset thing. Yeah, I didn't feel good. Yeah, I was sick 90% of those days I was there, but I was showing up, and so I didn't use any of those as an excuse.”

It was through their resilience that they were able to succeed. P2 talks about the importance of not being hard on himself,

“I'm not a perfectionist, I'm not, but I do hold myself to a high level, and so whenever I don't so well on an exam, I can't get down...I don't know where it went wrong, but like that still gives me an opportunity to prove not only to myself but to my family...I'm not gonna give up because there's still something on the other end of this to where I can not only make our lives better within the family, but I can improve the lives of those that I work with.”

P5 poignantly expressed the connection between support, resilience, and success,

I've always had a sense of sacrifice that other people have done, right? So, knowing, okay, neither my mother or father have ever been to a university, stepped foot on a university, but they're sacrificing their money to send me here or my grandmother, or anybody like that. So just thinking of the sacrifice of others, I was like okay, no matter what obstacles put before me, I have to succeed because I have the weight of these people on my back to not let them down for the opportunity I was given. So, a sense of purpose,

a sense of history, that our struggle, our people have had is what really made me say, you know what, no matter what set before me, I have to succeed.

P3 also reflected on the importance of his resilience:

“...That I wanted to mentor students who were going to go through the similar experiences that I was going through. And so that helped push me. I also did not want to be the one in the cohort who was going to lead to the downfall, whether it be pass rates, or whether it be that one who just couldn't make it through. So that was a motivating factor for me.”

Place

Participants sharing their stories as students in occupational therapy programs at PWIs described similarities and differences that influenced their experiences related to place. They shared stories that reflected their experience as being the only male or the only male of color and how that impacted the group dynamics in their cohort. Some shared how location characteristics such as attending an institution in a rural town or urban city influenced their educational experience. They described the impact of support or a lack of support of the faculty and staff. Participants also described the impact of being the only Black male OTP in their workplace settings and the impact of representation for patient care. These findings are also consistent with the literature review themes under factors of success (institutional efforts and mentoring) and diversity and representation, and the narrative threads of belonging and diversity and representation.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study provide important implications for both occupational therapy education and workplace settings, particularly for Black male students and professionals. Many

of the participants shared similar experiences during their academic journeys in occupational therapy programs at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). These shared narratives highlight the challenges that Black male students face, including feelings of not belonging and a lack of support, which can hinder their academic success and professional development. These insights have significant implications for current occupational therapy faculty, practitioners, and national organizations, who should consider implementing more targeted strategies to enhance the experiences and success of Black male students in the field of occupational therapy.

One significant implication is the need for occupational therapy programs to better support diverse student populations. While institutions may offer social programs for students, there is often a lack of effective orientation to these services, especially at the graduate level. To facilitate student success, it is crucial for institutions to ensure that all students are aware of and able to access available support systems. Additionally, the study emphasized the importance of resilience and self-advocacy as key traits for success among Black male students in occupational therapy. These characteristics are strong indicators of their ability to navigate the challenges they encounter. The findings also underscore the value of mentorship and peer support. Participants highlighted the importance of having a mentor, faculty member, or peer group that shares similar experiences—whether that means having a mentor who is male, African American, or both. Such mentors, having gone through similar journeys, are uniquely positioned to provide valuable guidance and support to students facing the same challenges and victories.

Recommendations for Institutions and Occupational Therapy Programs

Occupational therapy programs should consider the culture of the classroom when the cohorts are homogeneous and are comprised of students who may not have experience learning with or providing care for those of diverse cultures, races, genders, or backgrounds. Programs

should require training in implicit bias and cultural diversity, with practical demonstration of the learning objectives. P4 mentioned that his academic program held a seminar to discuss Black hair. This example can be expanded to other aspects of a diverse population. P3 shared that though his institution attracted a diverse student body, the curriculum in the OT program focused on teaching students how to care for one type of patient. He stated,

...despite the fact that they attracted a global audience and a global cohort, it affected my learning experience because I had to advocate more for the fact that I was different, and thus going to be treating a populace that were different, that perhaps looked like me, and didn't look like the populace that they were training us to treat.

Predominantly White Institutions and occupational therapy programs should actively work to recruit and retain faculty that include Black men and women. Some participants shared the impact of having faculty that looked like them, but also the frustration of faculty that did not respond with action when problems of discrimination within the class and cohort were brought to their attention. Faculty and staff should not only listen, but take action to support the needs of Black male students. P2 expressed his frustration with being told "I hear you" from faculty, but not seeing their willingness to act or "ruffle feathers":

I always hate hearing, 'I hear you', 'I hear your concerns', cause you're trying to calm me down, or you're trying to like make it like it's not that big of a deal where it's just like, you get to go home and like wake up next day and you don't have to deal with this. But yeah, I wake up, and this is like the third semester I had to deal with this, with the same classmates who haven't changed whatsoever.

PWIs, whether in urban or rural settings, large or small, should support and promote groups on campus for students of color, especially Black men. It is important that this support

and promotion extend to graduate programs, which typically include non-traditional students who are not on campus full-time. P7 shared that his institution created spaces that he felt comfortable in such as a student organization of Black male students on campus and the impact of that resource:

There was a group...that was just a group of African American males who just wanted to, you know, have a safe space to just talk, show what it's like being African American in classrooms that are largely predominantly different...and it gave us a chance to sort of finally be in a room where we see all of us, and that experience really, really, really helped me.

Recommendations for Students

Students pursuing a degree in occupational therapy must lean into all of the support available. Students should identify a mentor that can help them navigate through the rigor of these intensive academic programs and the non-academic conditions that can hinder their progress. The support person could be a family member, a member of a community group, a faculty or staff member, or peer. Additionally, students must advocate for change within their spaces for their current and future selves, and for those that will follow. This may appear to be an overwhelming and daunting task, but the benefits are worth the work. P1 shared his story of how he and his two Black male peers created support systems such as a graduate chapter of the Black Student Union on their campus, and how they brought awareness of established institutional support into the occupational therapy program more intentionally,

We implemented a survey, so to speak. Obviously, you know, every school has that if you have any discrepancies, or if you feel like you're being racially profiled you can write a request, or you can anonymously send something in. But we actually had them

put it on the front of the syllabus so that the direct link, because it was on page 25...bring it to the front and attention to the front of it to let everyone know, not just Black and Brown, but everyone right? We also had a QR code on each door of each classroom, so you had a problem with one of the professors, you felt there was some racial bias, or any complaint, it will go to not only to the director, will go to the DEI officer as well.

Recommendations for Occupational Therapy Practitioners and Employers

Occupational therapy practitioners must reach back and connect. OTPs should connect with students, tell their stories, and volunteer to be a mentor, whether informally or through structured mentorship programs. This action benefits Black male students and the profession as a whole. P5 shared his experience and experiences shared by others, of being actively discouraged by counselors and advisors in high school and college from pursuing occupational therapy. They were told that there was too much science, and the programs are too competitive for them. He spoke of a situation where a Black male student, who was also told he should pursue an easier career, called his facility seeking volunteer hours, and the student's reflection of just hearing P5's voice:

He said, at the time he was like, 'you sounded like a brother, but I wasn't sure!', you know. And I said yeah sure, you can come by. And when he saw me, his eyes were like, 'oh, wow!' And so, we've kept in touch and things of that nature. But I was just shocked that that was still going on. Discouragement from people empowered to say, yeah, why don't you go in a different direction?'

Recommendations for Future Research

Building upon the findings of this study, researchers can take several directions to further research for education and professional practice in occupational therapy. There is a need to

evaluate the effectiveness of institutional support mechanisms, including orientation programs, mentorship initiatives, and peer support networks. Researchers should investigate which types of support are most impactful in promoting retention, academic success, and a sense of belonging among Black male OT students. Also, investigating the perspectives of faculty and administrators regarding diversity and inclusion efforts can provide insight into how institutional policies are implemented in practice and identify potential gaps in support. Understanding faculty readiness and capacity to mentor diverse students is particularly relevant.

Further research on mentorship models specific to Black male students in occupational therapy is warranted. Comparative studies of peer mentorship, faculty mentorship, and alumni engagement could help identify the most effective strategies for providing guidance and fostering professional identity. The content and delivery of cultural competency training within OT curricula is also worth examination. Studies could assess how well students feel prepared to engage in culturally responsive practice and how curricular content influences their perceptions of inclusivity within the profession. Examining barriers to entry into OT programs for Black men, such as limited exposure to the profession, financial constraints, or lack of representation, can inform recruitment strategies aimed at increasing diversity in the field. Collectively, these research directions can help create more equitable and supportive pathways for Black male students in occupational therapy, ultimately contributing to a more diverse and inclusive profession.

Conclusions

The problem this study addressed was the low degree attainment among Black males and the low representation of Black males in occupational therapy. The participants in this study were Black men who achieved a degree in occupational therapy from a PWI. The narratives

shared by these men were examined through the lens of Clandinin's (2023) commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place. We found that these stories shared commonalities of past experiences, present concerns, and future aspirations; personal and social conditions; and, institutional settings. The narrative threads of resilience, belonging, systems of support, and diversity and representation were also found. This study is important to practice for academic programs of occupational therapy, and for professional practice in occupational therapy.

The results of the stories shared indicate that there is work to be done to better understand and support the needs of Black men in occupational therapy programs. While the needs of every student are important, Black men are unique, and their experiences are unique given the complex fabric of personal and societal factors that impact their experiences. Faculty and staff can benefit from culturally competent training to build inclusive cultures within OT programs for the student cohorts. Similarly, workplaces for occupational therapy practitioners can benefit from providing similar training to build a workforce from whose experiences their clients can best benefit. Resilience and self-advocacy were factors the men in this study relied on for their success in academia. With these factors and the recommendations of this study, we can further the future of occupational therapy students to degree attainment and increased representation in occupational therapy practitioners and students for generations to come.

References

- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 2, 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100051>
- Allen, Q. (2020). (In)visible men on campus: Campus racial climate and subversive black masculinities at a predominantly White liberal arts university. *Gender and Education*, 32(7), 843-861.
- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). *AOTA 2019 workforce and salary survey*. AOTA Press.
- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2023). *AOTA 2023 compensation and workforce survey*. AOTA Press.
- Ayoobzadeh, M. (2023). Peer-mentoring and doctoral student retention: A longitudinal investigation. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 42(3), 513-529.
- Bamberger, M. R., & Smith, T. J. (2023). First-generation college students: Goals and challenges of community college. *Community College Review*, 51(3), 445-462.
- Brewster, D., & Ashley, K. (2019). African American male students' perceptions of self-efficacy, student engagement, and mentoring and student retention. *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership*, 6, 51-61.
- Brooms, D. R. (2020). Helping us think about ourselves: Black males' sense of belonging through connections and relationship with faculty in college. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 33(9), 921-938.
- Brooms, D. R. (2021). Educational desires and resilience among Black male students at a Hispanic-serving institution. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance Online Publication. doi:10.1037/dhe0000381

- Brown, K., Lamont, A., Do, A., Schoessow, K. (2021, May/June). Increasing racial and ethnic diversity in occupational therapy education: The role of Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) standards. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 75(3), 7503347020. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2021.047746>
- Brown, L., Cohen, B., Costello, R., Brazhnik, O., & Galis, Z. (2023). Conceptualizing a resilience research framework at the NIH. *Stress and Health*, 39(S1), 4-9.
- Caporale-Berkowitz, N. A., Boyer, B. P., Muenks, K., & Brownson, C. B. (2022, February 7). Resilience, not grit, predicts college student retention following academic probation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/edu0000721>
- Chalmers, J., & Cowdell, F. (2021). What are quantitative and qualitative research methods? A brief introduction. *Dermatological Nursing*, 20(2), 45-48.
- Chelberg, K. L., & Bosman, L. B. (2019). The role of faculty mentoring in improving retention and completion rates for historically underrepresented STEM students. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 8(2), 39-48.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2023). *Engaging in narrative inquiry* (2nd edition). Routledge. DOI 10.4324/9781003240143
- Cleary, M., Thapa, D. K., West, S., Lopez, V., Williamson, M., Sahay, A., & Kornhaber, R. (2023). Mentoring students in doctoral nursing programs: A scoping review. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 45, 71-88.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.

- Connelly F. M., Clandinin D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In Green J. L., Camilli G., Elmore P. B. (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 477–487). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., McCoy, W. N., & Gibson, S. M. (2023). The compounding impact of racial microaggressions: The experiences of African American students in predominantly White institutions. *Teachers College Record*, *125*(5), 43-55.
- Dickson, T., & Zafereo, J. (2020). Faculty and programmatic influences on the percentage of graduates of color from professional physical therapy programs in the United States. *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, *26*, 215-235.
- Dorime-Williams, M. L., & Choi, S. (2023). Class, sex and the role of involvement on Black collegians degree attainment. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *16*(2), 194-204.
- Finlay, J., & dela Cruz, A. (2023). Reflexivity and relational spaces: Experiences of conducting a narrative inquiry study with emerging adult women living with chronic pain. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, *10*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23333936231190619>
- Ford, A. R., Smith, D. L., & Banister, G. E. (2021). Recruitment and retention of occupational therapy practitioners and students of color: A qualitative study. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *75*(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.039446>
- Gazley, J. L., & Campbell, P. B. (2020). The role of resilience in Black men's success in STEM graduate programs. *Journal of Negro Education*, *89*(3), 360-372. Retrieved from <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=eric&AN=EJ1286421&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=s1229530>
- Goings, R. B. (2021). Introducing the Black male adult learner success theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *71*(2), 128-147.

- Harper, S. R. (2010). An anti-deficit achievement framework for research on students of color in STEM. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 148, 63-74.
- Haydon, G., & van der Riet, P. (2016). Narrative inquiry: A relational research methodology suitable to explore narratives of health and illness. *Nordic Journal of Nursing Research*, 37(2), 85-89.
- Helling, J., & Chandler, G. (2021). Meeting the psychological health & growth needs of Black college students: Culture, resonance and resilience. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 35(2), 152-180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2019.1660291>
- Hines, E. M., Cooper, J. N., & Corral, M. (2019). Overcoming the odds: First-generation Black and Latino male collegians' perspectives on pre-college barriers and facilitators. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 13(1), 51-69. Retrieved from <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=eric&AN=EJ1209936&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=s1229530> <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JME-11-2017-0064>
- Irvine, F. R. (2019). Academic success of African American males in a historically black university. *Journal of African American Studies*, 23, 203-216.
- Jeter, F., & Melendez, J. (2022). Too few Black male educators. *Impacting Education: Journal on Transforming Professional Practice*, 7(2), 19-25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5195/ie.2022.200>
- Kaba, A. J. (2024). The educational attainment of Black Americans and gender, 2012 and 2022: Resilience, factors, implications and recommendations. *Higher Education Studies*, 14(4), 115-132.

- Lane, S. R. (2020). Addressing the stressful first year in college: Could peer mentoring be a critical strategy? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 22(3), 481-496.
- Long, L. L., & Travers, C. S. (2021). Brotherly bond: A collaborative autoethnographic analysis of Black male scholars. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 90(2), 183-194.
- Matthews, A. K., Abboud, S., Smith, A. U., Smith, C., Jeremiah, R., Hart, A., & Weaver, T. (2022). Strategies to address structural and institutional barriers to success among students of color in nursing programs. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 40, 96–104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2022.03.005>
- McCall, D. J., & Castles, J. (2020). A place for me? African American transfer student involvement on the campus of a predominantly White institution in the Midwest. *Journal of Black Studies*, 51(6), 587-610.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Mumba, M., Cody, S., & Bail, J. (2021, December). Securing the future of nursing: Strategies to create pipelines of nurse scientists through targeted student mentoring. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 44(6), 873-874.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). Percentage of persons 25 to 29 years old with selected levels of educational attainment, by race/ethnicity and sex: Selected years, 1920 through 2021 [Table]. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_104.20.asp
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). Annual Earnings by Educational Attainment. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of

Education Sciences. Retrieved July 2, 2023,

from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cba>.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Table 321.20. Associate's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected academic years, 1976–77 through 2021–22; Table 322.20. Bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected academic years 1976–77 through 2021–22; Table 323.20. Master's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected academic years, 1976–77 through 2021–22; and Table 324.20. Doctor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected academic years, 1976–77 through 2021–22* [Data tables]. In *Digest of education statistics*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979). *The Belmont report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html>

Ottley, J. A., & Ellis, A. L. (2019). A qualitative analysis: Black male perceptions of retention initiatives at a rural predominately white institution. *Educational Foundations*, 32(1-4), 72. Retrieved from <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=edsgea&AN=e-dsgcl.611171920&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=s1229530>

- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 42*, 533-544.
- Patterson, L. D., Wheeler, R. M., Edge, N., Daniel, G. (2023). The High School to Higher Education Pipeline Program: A focus on Black male representation in nursing. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 47*, 15-24.
- Robbins, A., Kaye, E., & Catling, J. C. (2018). Predictors of student resilience in higher education. *Psychology Teaching Review, 24*(1), 44-52. Retrieved from <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=eric&AN=EJ1180345&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=s1229530>
- Salvant, S., Kleine, E. A., Gibbs, V. D. (2021). Be heard—We're listening: Emerging issues and potential solutions from the voices of BIPOC occupational therapy students, practitioners, and educators. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 75*(6), 7506347010. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2021.048306>
- Santangelo, J., Elijah, R., Filippi, L., Mammo, B., Mundorff, E., & Weingartner, K. (2022). An integrated achievement and mentoring (iAM) model to promote STEM student retention and success. *Education Sciences, 12*(843), 1-21.
- Scott, L., & Sharp, L. A. (2019). Black males who hold advanced degrees: Critical factors that preclude and promote success. *Journal of Negro Education, 88*(1), 44-61. doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.88.1.0044

- Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education, 44*(1), 26-29.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2023). Estimating differences in the effects of living-learning community participation on Black students' sense of belonging at predominantly white and historically black colleges and universities. *Journal of College Student Development, 64*(2), 225-230.
- Ting, H., Memon, M. A., Thurasamy, R., & Cheah, J. (2025). Snowball sampling: A review and guidelines for survey research. *Asian Journal of Business Research, 15*(1), 1-15.
- Tope-Banjoko, T., Davis, V., Morrison, K., Fife, J., Hill, O., & Talley, C. (2020). Academic resilience in college students: Relationship between coping and GPA. *Anatolian Journal of Education, 5*(2), 109-120. Retrieved from <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=eric&AN=EJ1269820&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=s1229530>
- Wienclaw, R. (2021). Quantitative and qualitative analysis. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.
- Williams, M. (2020). Microaggressions: Clarification, evidence, and impact. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 15*(1), 3-26.
- Yin, R. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). The Guildford Press.
<https://eli.johogo.com/Class/Qualitative%20Research.pdf>
- Zhou, X. & Pan, G. (2023). Higher education and the Black-White earnings gap. *American Sociological Review, 88*(1), 154-188.

Appendices

Appendix A

Consent Form

My name is Kimberly Simpson, and I am a doctoral student at National University (NU). I also hold a role as Program Coordinator and Full-time faculty of the Occupational Therapy Assistant program at Mott Community College.

I'm asking you to take part in a research study about your experience as a Black male who achieved a graduate degree in occupational therapy from a predominantly White institution (PWI). The name of this research is "How Black Male Occupational Therapy Students Persisted to Degree Attainment: A Narrative Inquiry."

You may participate in this research if you meet all of the following criteria:

1. Your race is "Black" or "African American."
2. You are a cisgender male.
3. You graduated with a master's or doctorate degree in occupational therapy from a predominantly White institution.

I hope to include 10 people in this research.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Participate in a 1:1 online interview over Zoom for 60 minutes. Or,
2. Participate in one follow up interview over Zoom for 30 minutes.
3. Review your interview transcript via email for 15-20 minutes.
4. Provide feedback via email on accuracy of interview transcript.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Your experience as a student at the institution where you received your degree in occupational therapy.
- Your experience with resources to support your academic success.
- Your race and gender in relation to your academic experience.

Risks: There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research. You can still skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participating at any time.

Benefits: If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. This research may increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this research.

Recording: [Include this section if you are recording your participants, such as during an interview or focus group. If you are not recording participants, delete this section.]

I would like to audio/video record your responses and/or actions with Zoom during the interview/focus group.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be maintained if/when any information from interview/focus group is published in the final study. For purposes of the research study, all identifiers will be removed from the data collected. The information obtained from this study will be kept confidential with names and identifiers being coded or pseudonyms applied in reporting. At no point will your identity be revealed. All electronic data will be housed on a private, password-protected computer, which is accessible only to the researcher. Any physical documents will be stored in a locked case.

Taking part is voluntary: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may quit at any time.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at [email] or at [phone number].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may

contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at irb@nu.edu

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Interview Location: Via Zoom teleconference. Zoom interviews.

Materials: Hard copy of the interview questions, and a notebook for notes to be taken during interview.

Interviewer: Kimberly Simpson

Interview Overview:

Study purpose: The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study is to explore the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a graduate degree in occupational therapy from a PWI.

Value of the participant's information: The information shared is valuable to this study as it will provide a unique narrative of the experiences shared by Black males who achieved a graduate degree in occupational therapy from a PWI and how those experiences lead to their successful degree completion.

How you will share study results with participants: Each participant will be provided with a summary of the results.

Length of interview: Minimum of 60 minutes

(Ask for permission to record the interview): Part of the interview process includes video and audio recording, so the data may be transcribed and reviewed later. Do you give consent to be recorded during this interview?

Process of the interview:

At the beginning of the interview the researcher will debrief participants on the anti-deficit framework and Black male adult learner success theory. After each individual participant is debriefed, the individual interview will be conducted. A warmup question will be used to build rapport. The semi-structured research questions will act as a guide: however, discussion will be encouraged from the participants about their lived experiences. When a question is posed, the participant will have the opportunity to answer freely without interruption until the participant has completed their response. The researcher will ask the questions and the participants will answer. This researcher will ask to follow up and/or add additional probing questions, as needed to expand upon or clarify responses. The interview will be conducted and recorded via Zoom.

Consent Form/Ethical Considerations: The researcher will cover the conditions in the previously signed consent form, highlighting the following points:

How/if confidentiality will be maintained: Confidentiality will be maintained if/when any information from the interview is published in the final study. For purposes of the research study, all identifiers will be removed from the data collected. The information obtained from this study will be kept confidential with names and identifiers being coded or pseudonyms applied in reporting. At no point will your identity be revealed. All electronic data will be housed on a private, password-protected computer, which is accessible only to the researcher. Any physical documents will be stored in a locked case.

Their ability to stop at any time without any consequences: You may voluntarily end or exit the interview at any time without any consequences.

The researcher will ensure participant questions have been addressed prior to starting the interview by asking the question:

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Warm up question: What led you to the field of occupational therapy?

Interview Questions:

1. Describe your journey of pursuing a graduate degree in occupational therapy at a predominantly white institution (PWI). What motivated you to choose this path?
2. In your experience, how did the cultural or racial dynamics at the PWI influence your educational experience? Probing question: How did the educational environment foster a sense of belonging and community?
3. What were some of the challenges you faced as a Black male student in the occupational therapy program at a PWI?
4. How did you navigate and overcome any obstacles or barriers during your academic journey?
5. Resilience is defined as one's ability to bounce back from challenges. How do you think resilience impacted your success? Probing question: What is one example?
6. What do you recall were the main factors that led to your success?
7. What were the specific support systems or resources that were particularly helpful to you during your time in the program?

8. Describe any challenges in the educational environment related to your gender or race.
9. What strategies did you use to overcome any challenges to your success?
10. How do you believe your identity as a Black male influenced your interactions with faculty, peers, and clients during your clinical experiences? Probing questions: How would you describe your faculty mentor experience?
11. As it relates to diversity and representation in the profession, what is your experience as a Black male occupational therapist?
12. Reflecting on your overall experience, what advice would you give to other Black males aspiring to pursue a graduate degree in occupational therapy at a PWI?
13. In what ways do you hope to contribute to the field of occupational therapy, particularly in addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Example Probing Questions:

- Would you explain the point you made on...
- Could you share an example of...
- Could you describe the experience you just mentioned where you...
- Could you explain what you meant by...
- Could you provide another example of...
- Could you tell me more about why/how you...

End this section with the question:

Is there anything you would like to discuss that we have not covered? Do you have any questions or anything you would like to share before we end this interview?

Appendix C

Non-Disclosure/Confidentiality Agreement

I (transcriber's name) will help Kimberly Simpson with the research study titled "How Black Male Occupational Therapy Students Persisted to Degree Attainment: A Narrative Inquiry."

My role will be to transcribe participant interviews.

In this role:

1. I will not disclose the names of any participants in the study.
2. I will not disclose personal information collected from any participants in the study.
3. I will not disclose any participant responses.
4. I will not disclose any data.
5. I will not discuss the research with anyone other than the researcher(s).
6. I will keep all paper information secure while it is in my possession.
7. I will keep all electronic information secure while it is in my possession.
8. I will return all information to the researcher when I am finished with my work.
9. I will destroy any extra copies that were made during my work.
10. Other (researcher add items if needed).

Signature Date

Researcher Signature Date